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ABSTRACT

This document is one of three texts which comprise the written components of The Responsive College Programme dissemination materials. The program is designed to help colleges in the United Kingdom market themselves and their courses effectively, and this volume, which is freestanding and directed at both the general reader and the specialist, provides the argument underlying the program, in part by presenting the prototypical success story of an imaginary institution called "Phoenix College." The book is divided CE060195 into five sections: (1) "College Marketing:; (2) "Marketing Research"; (3) "Product Development, Promotion, and Selling"; (4) "Quality Control and After-Sales Service"; and (5) "Managers and Marketeers." In the first section, the book discusses what college marketing is and its importance, its costs, its effectiveness, who should do it, and marketing and the responsive college. Topics in the second section include explanations of the marketing research concept, researching competitors, and conducting primary and secondary research. The third section discusses the college course as a product to be sold, and describes the ways of developing, promoting, and selling the curriculum just like any other product. Section 4 examines the evaluation process of college marketing in terms of customer satisfaction, enrollment rates, student retention and progression, and examination pass rates. Finally, the fifth section briefly explores the job of manager and marketeer within the college atmosphere. Numerous color photographies and other color graphics illustrate the text. The appendix provides a description of The Responsive College Programme. Contains an index and 25 references. (GLR)

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Marketing the College

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By Ernest Theodossin

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Marketing the College

By Ernest Theodossin

About the Author

Ernest Theodossin was born and educated to first degree level (University of Michigan) in the United States. He came to Britain as a postgraduate student (University of London), began a teaching career in English (school, technical college, college of education) and became a naturalised British subject. In the 1970s he retrained (University of London Institute of Education) in educational management and taught (institute of higher education, university) in this field before joining the Further Education Staff College as a staff tutor. Both his doctorate and his later work have been in the management of planned change. For FESC he has published **Management restructuring in an FE college** (1984), **The modular market** and **In search of the responsive college** (both 1986). Since 1985 he has been Deputy Director of the Responsive College Programme.

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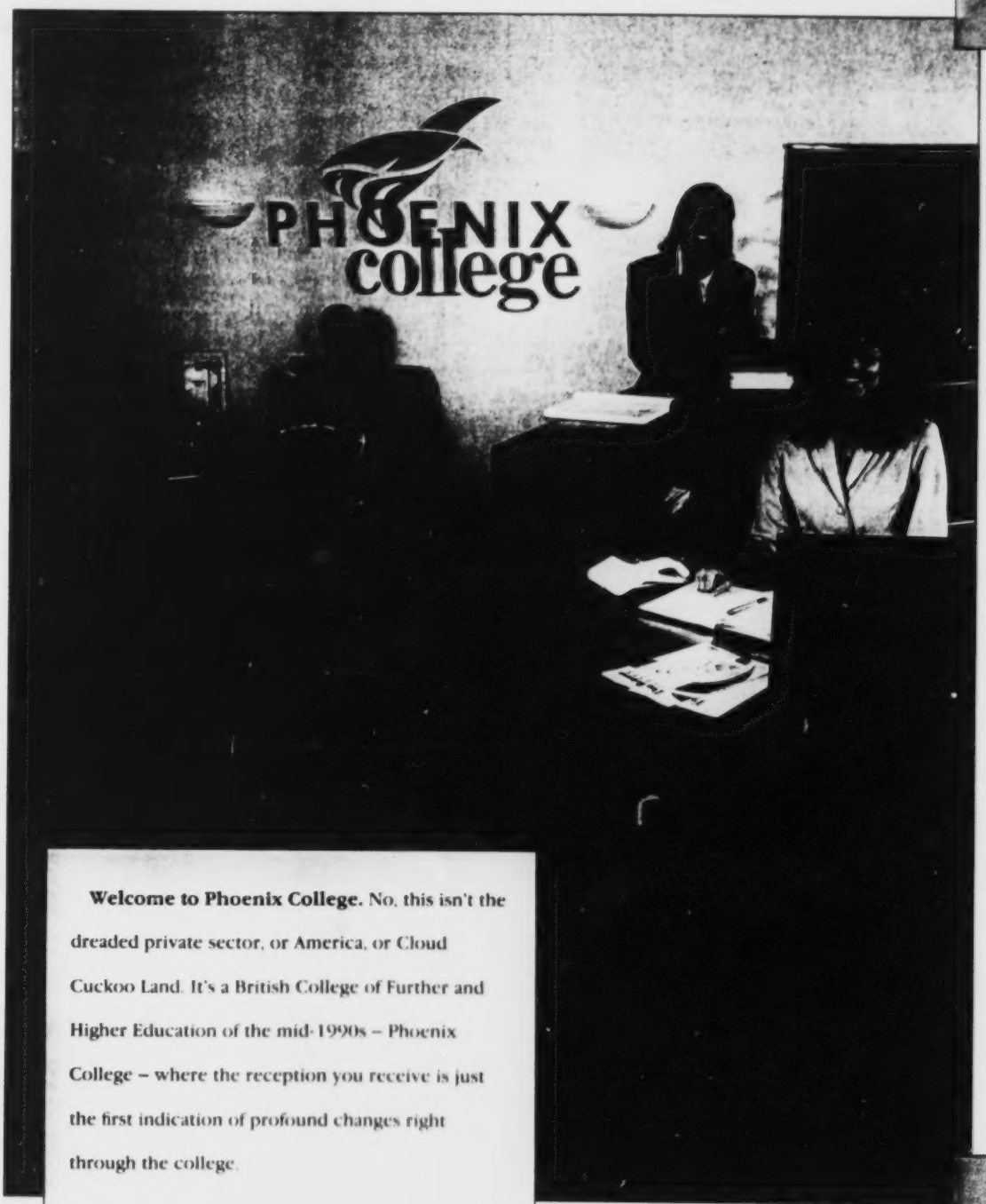

Welcome to Phoenix College. No, this isn't the dreaded private sector, or America, or Cloud Cuckoo Land. It's a British College of Further and Higher Education of the mid-1990s – Phoenix College – where the reception you receive is just the first indication of profound changes right through the college.

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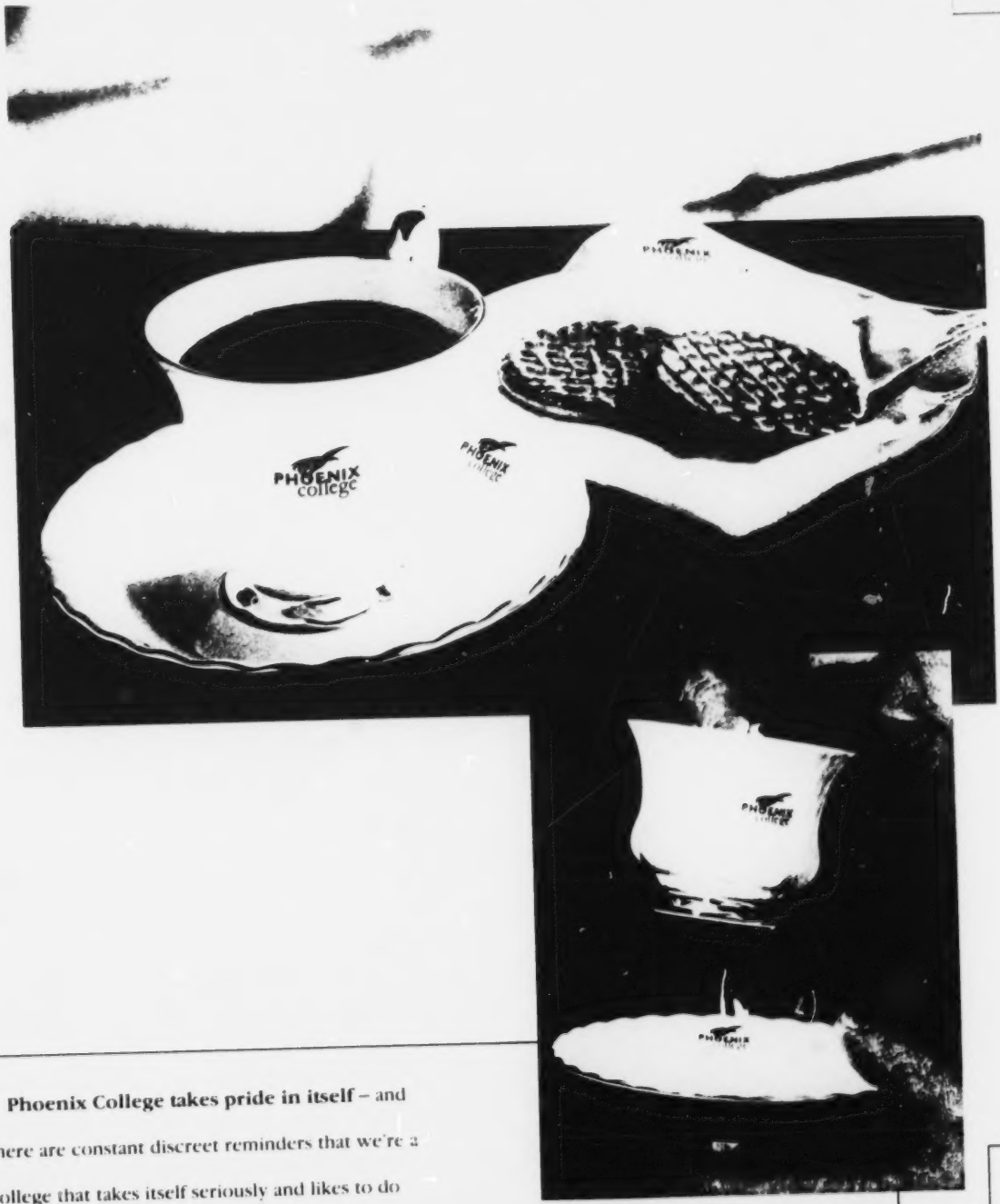
As a visitor at Phoenix College, you get the same kind of attention you'd receive visiting a good sized, successful company.

And why not?



Phoenix College takes pride in itself – and there are constant discreet reminders that we're a college that takes itself seriously and likes to do things well – right down to the smallest detail.

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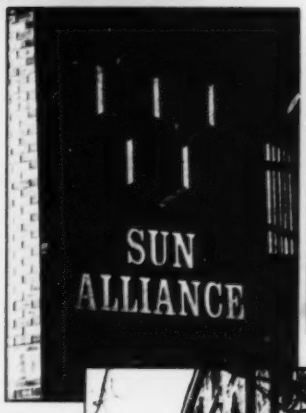
Since the 1980s, the world of Further and Higher Education has been turned upside-down: there are more older and retired people and fewer young ones. School-leavers are a small minority of the college population. It's quite normal to find adults training and retraining for second and third careers. Far more people are running their own small businesses – and they buy training regularly, as an investment.

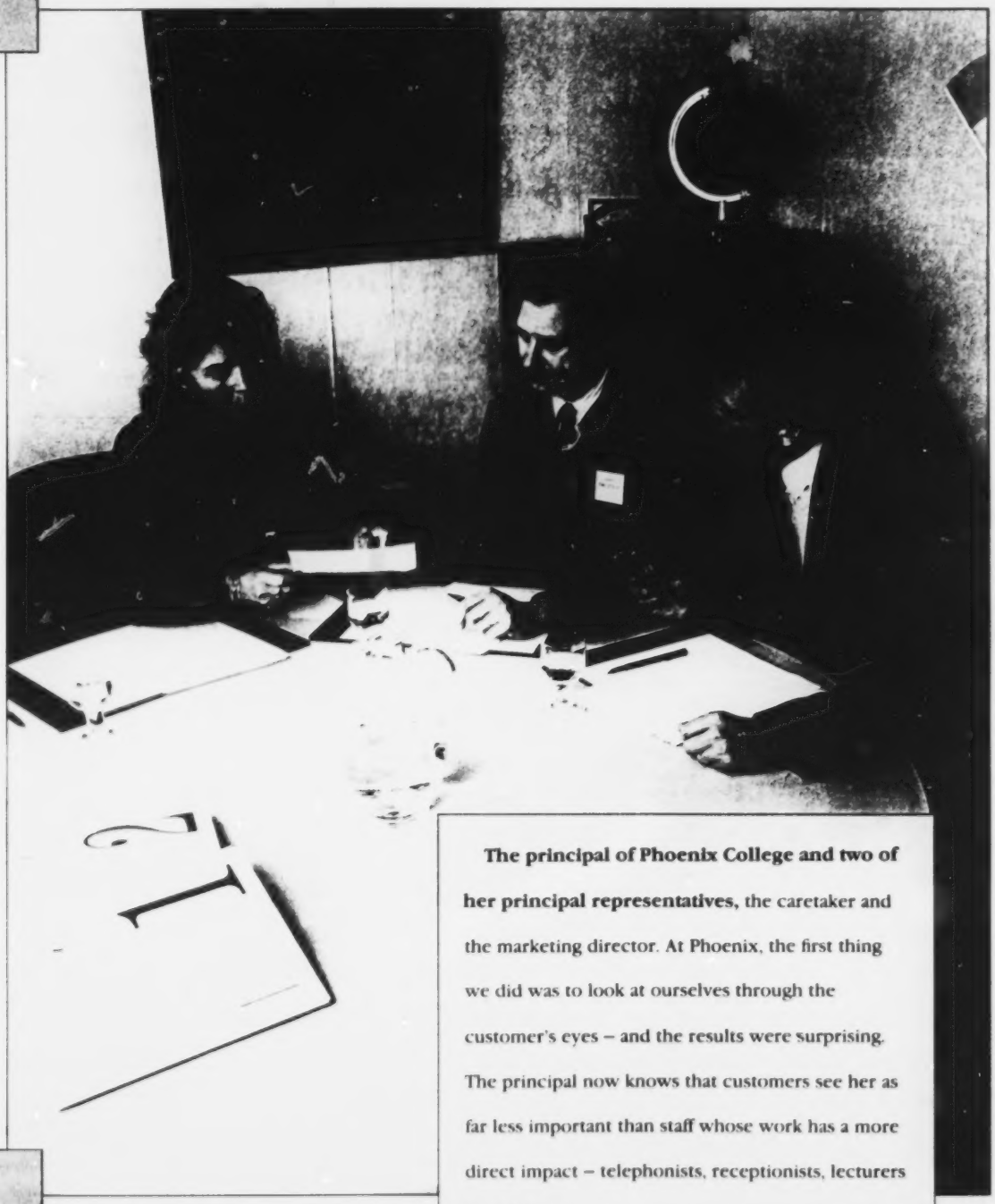


There's fierce competition for school-leavers in the world of Phoenix College – and not just within further and higher education. Schools are hanging on to their pupils for dear life. Polytechnics and universities, now being hit by falling rolls, are keen to get hold of students – and employers' needs haven't slackened, even if the birthrate has.

Typical customers of Phoenix College.

Actually, 'typical customers' are hard to find – and they're certainly not only 16 to 19-year-olds. We have a lot of single parents, more students from

ethnic minorities are enrolling, and many of the new self-employed are coming to us to learn business skills quickly in our short weekend and evening courses.



The principal of Phoenix College and two of her principal representatives, the caretaker and the marketing director. At Phoenix, the first thing we did was to look at ourselves through the customer's eyes – and the results were surprising. The principal now knows that customers see her as far less important than staff whose work has a more direct impact – telephonists, receptionists, lecturers and cleaners.

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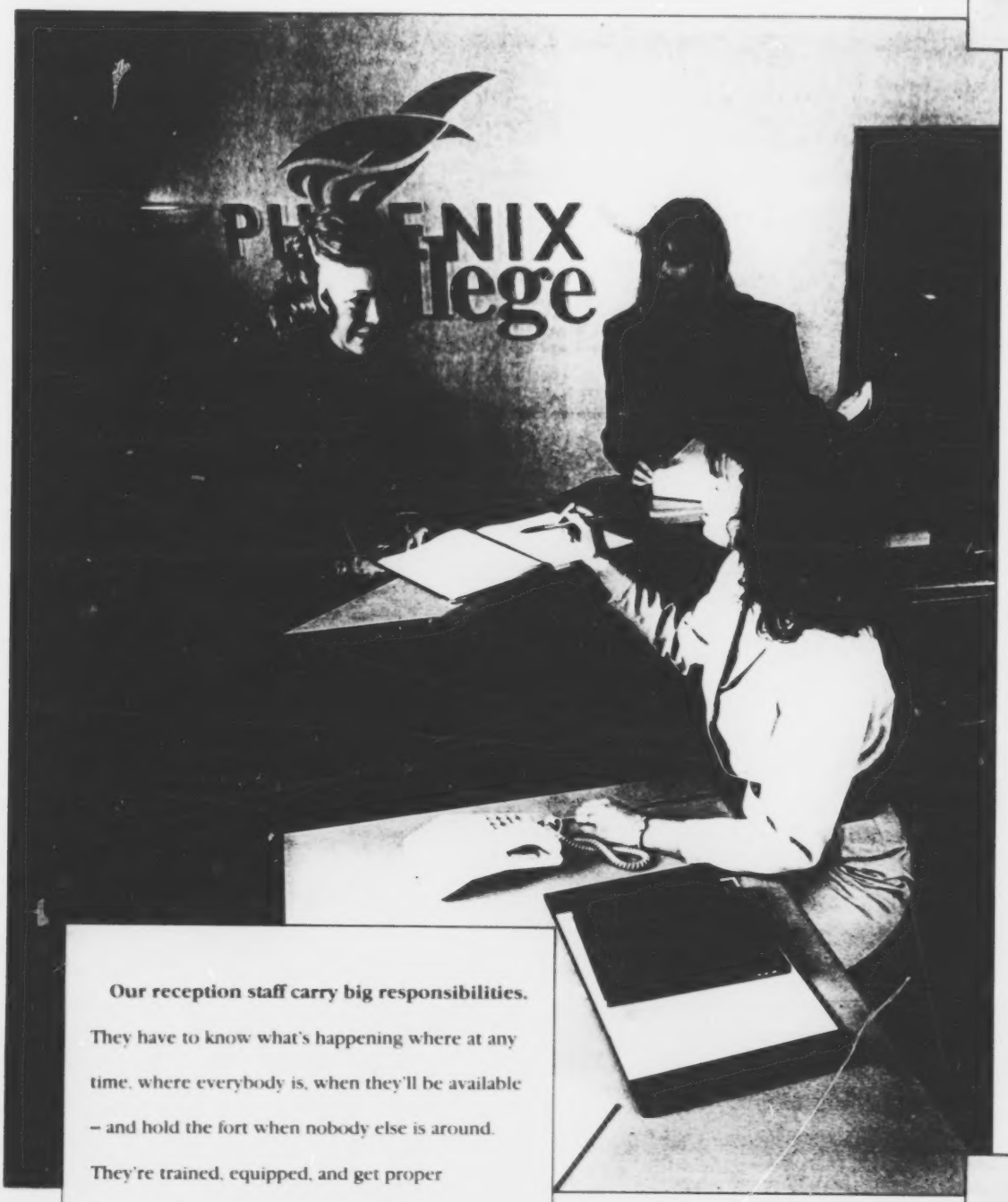

Our reception staff carry big responsibilities.

They have to know what's happening where at any time, where everybody is, when they'll be available – and hold the fort when nobody else is around. They're trained, equipped, and get proper acknowledgement for the vital job they do.

At Phoenix we keep in touch with our employer customers. We visit them regularly and stay abreast of market-place developments and needs. If we've nothing appropriate on the shelf, we're ready and able to produce customised training.

We also know what happens to our students once they leave us. Tracking student destinations is an important part of our marketing work.

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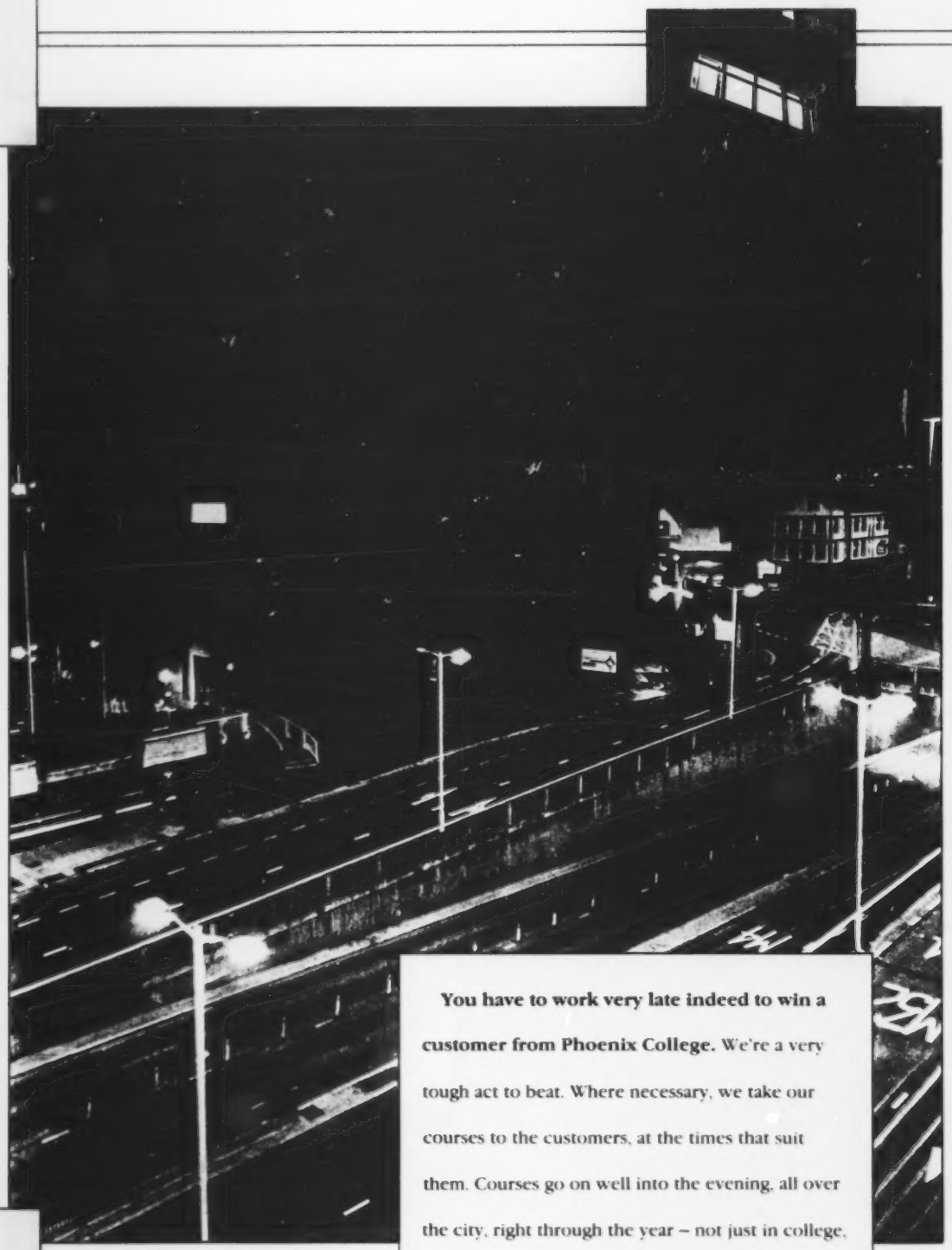

You have to work very late indeed to win a customer from Phoenix College. We're a very tough act to beat. Where necessary, we take our courses to the customers, at the times that suit them. Courses go on well into the evening, all over the city, right through the year – not just in college, in college hours, in term time.

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Foreword

This volume is part of a training package designed to help colleges market themselves and their courses effectively. The Government is committed to helping colleges to be responsible to their customers and potential customers, both students and employers. These materials result from three years' work by a team from The Further Education Staff College, funded by the Government.

In these days of increased independence for colleges, marketing will be seen as more and more important. The materials offer a sound and practical approach to college marketing which we believe will be of value to all colleges throughout the country and to the customers whom they serve.

John Cope
Minister of State
Department of Employment

Robert Jackson
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Education and Science

Michael Forsyth
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Scottish Office

Wyn Roberts
Minister of State
Welsh Office

troduction and knowledgements

This volume is one of three texts which comprise the written components of The Responsive College Programme dissemination materials.

The programme was a marketing initiative managed from the Further Education Staff College and funded by the Manpower Services (now Employment Department: Training Agency) Commission. Approximately £2.25m was spent to promote college marketing in 21 local education authority projects carried out in England, Scotland and Wales during the period 1986-88. The intention was to find out how best to market colleges and to make the results of large-scale monitored activity widely available throughout the education and training system. A brief account of the programme is provided in the Appendix.

The other two volumes are practitioners' manuals, one intended for those responsible for college marketing and the other for the managers who (need to) support such activity if it is to succeed. Both are reference books organised around specific tasks and problems and probably of greatest interest to those who undertake marketing.

Conversely, this volume is freestanding and is directed at both the general reader and the specialist. It provides the argument underlying the programme's approach to college marketing. This approach was first set out in the form of a Product Cycle Spiral in **In search of the responsive college** (Theodossin, 1986). What was intended was a holistic, comprehensive view of college marketing centred on the active participation of customers (or, as was cautiously suggested, clients) in the delivery of education and training.

My original ideas have been subsequently adopted and adapted, replicated and modified, developed and improved at college level by approximately 50 people appointed to work on the 21 projects. In turn, I have learnt a great deal from their efforts and insights. What

follows owes an enormous debt to a large number of individuals.

Above and beyond the many project reports which inform the following text, and personal assistance from colleagues in reading the various drafts, I am grateful to L. Bagshaw, T. Beery, R. Edge, I. Fryer, J. Groves-Hill, M. Grudzinski, and R. Marsh, who all gave up time to talk to me about marketing and the market-place. P. Shorthouse, D. Smale and M. Wren participated in a workshop which helped me devise the marketing research conceptual framework. G. Melling gave me encouragement and support. J. Finlayson devotedly went through my text, line by line, making invaluable editorial suggestions. Despite the assistance of so many, I am responsible for any errors, inaccuracies or omissions.

Ernest Theodossin,
August, 1988

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Chapter 1

College Marketing

PHOENIX college
Careers take off at Phoenix College
Full & Part Time
COURSES FOR NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
Prospectus
course enrolment '90
PHOENIX
PHOENIX college
PHOENIX

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Business Studies
PHOENIX College
Time
COURSES
Part »Time
COURSES
Day Release
COURSES
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ollege Marketing

The imaginary Phoenix College is a prototypical success story of the mid-1990s. Like the fabulous bird whose name it bears, Phoenix has been recreated through its own efforts.

Real changes have occurred. Respect for academic staff interests has taken second place to concern for customer needs. Phoenix no longer flogs dying courses: when demand falls, a course is modified or replaced. Redundant teaching skills are not protected by syllabus rigging. A staff development programme helps lecturers acquire new skills, not just through courses, but also via industrial and commercial secondments.

Phoenix now knows its customers: who they are, where they come from, what they want, whether they believe they get it, and what happens to them after they leave. It distinguishes between regular customers and one-time buyers, and it maintains close contacts with people who provide repeat business.

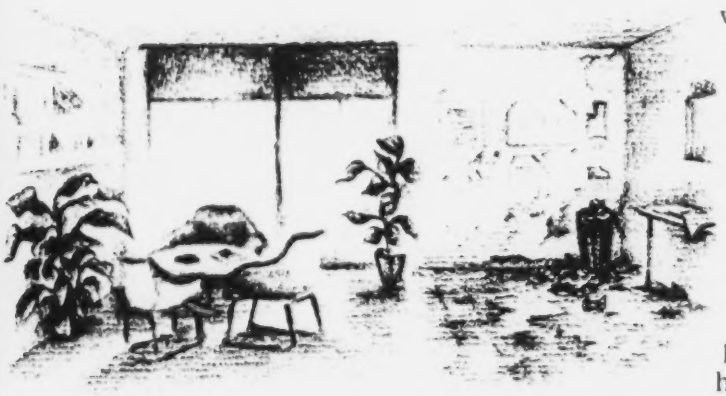
The college clientele is different. There are more women and more members of ethnic minority groups. A college crèche enables heads of single-parent households to receive training. More employers use college services. These shifts are reflected in a wide range of new courses and in the altered content of traditional ones. The student mean age has risen from under 21 to nearly 30: increasing numbers of employed adults retrain in the college. Senior staff appointments reflect the changing customer profile.

Some lecturers claim they were always sensitive to customers, but whereas they once anticipated user needs, staff now communicate regularly with students and employers. They ask questions and listen to answers. They take account of customer evidence when altering, replacing or adding to offerings.

Course delivery at Phoenix has changed radically. For a start the college runs a 48-week year, and not just for students on

Government sponsored courses. There is more evening work, and teaching occurs at weekends (including Sundays). Most college classes still take place between Monday morning and Friday afternoon, but the proportion is shrinking.

Before courses are advertised, the college tries to identify the most convenient times for potential buyers. The result is a timetable which reflects the requirements of new user groups such as heads of single-parent households and people trying to set up their own businesses. More and more work with employers involves short, customised courses, many of them run in factories and offices. The time between taking and delivering orders has been cut from months to days.



Back on base, Phoenix works at improving the college environment and offering customers the services they want. The college looks and feels different.

Tatty reception areas have been cleaned up and are nearly as attractive as the principal's study. The canteen has been improved so that it competes with local fast-food caterers. Personal, academic and career counselling are available. The multi-media library has been expanded and its opening hours increased. Telephonists take calls from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and an answerphone is available during the remainder of the week. Requests for help are dealt with rapidly. In all of this activity, the role of support staff has been expanded and their importance acknowledged.

These changes involved hard work. Rewards have been won. Other colleges and local secondary schools compete for the same customers. In the vocational field private trainers try to filch the most profitable provision. Not everyone has survived. Some colleges have been amalgamated. Others have closed departments or watched them shrink into sections. In the meantime, Phoenix has grown. It meets the

education and training needs of more people. It has become a responsive college.

The reason is that Phoenix College is committed to marketing.

Seeing the customer's view

Marketing is widely misunderstood by both the general public and college staff. The frequent error is to equate marketing with promotion and selling (advertisements, prospectuses, open days) or marketing research (seeking new opportunities). Of course marketing involves all this, but much else as well. A comprehensive definition of marketing (WFTE, 1985) is

> *...the creative process of satisfying customer needs profitably (effectively).*

This necessitates seeing what we offer through the customer's eyes, and one way of ensuring that we do is represented by the Product Cycle Spiral (Figure 1). This is an open systems model which envisages four marketing phases.

Marketing research identifies what customers want. *Product development, promotion and selling* involve producing what is needed and informing the right people in the right ways. *Quality control* ensures that delivery matches intentions. Courses can last one or more years. Staff move. The world changes. What was intended may not be happening or may now be inappropriate. *After-sales service* tracks the results. If education and training are a preparation for life and work, teachers are obliged to find out what has happened.

The cycle depicts responsiveness as customer satisfaction. The provider is both proactive (initiating enquiry, checking out delivery) and reactive (responding to client perceptions and experience). He/she asks, listens, and, if necessary, acts.

While the product cycle concentrates on customers, it does not preclude collecting evidence from others (teachers, inspectors, education officers), but implies that their views alone are insufficient. The result is to depict customer satisfaction as more important than provider satisfaction, but not to treat the latter as unimportant.

Figure 1. The Product Cycle Spiral.

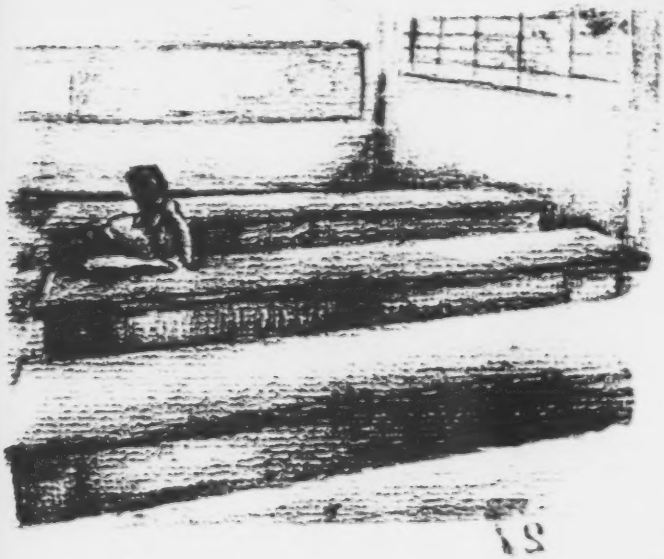
In a college committed to marketing, all the cycle's phases operate concurrently. They also overlap in purpose. Quality control and after-sales service are forms of marketing research. In revealing environmental changes, marketing research exposes deficiencies in current provision and represents a form of quality control. And so on.

The cycle need not be restricted to work-related courses, although if one tries to conduct an after-sales service in, for example, education-for-leisure, the logistics can prove daunting.

The product cycle is a management information system. Its purpose is to keep decision-makers informed about customer perceptions. How the data should be interpreted and used is not revealed in the system. Because there are many customers, the resulting data are unlikely to be consistent, which further compounds the difficulties of interpretation. The product cycle is a starting point and represents a commitment to treating customers seriously.

Why bother with marketing?

Survival of colleges in their present form is being challenged by demographic changes. The effects of a fall in the 1970s' birth rate by approximately a third are about to confront colleges with depleted traditional markets. **Managing colleges efficiently** (DES/WO, 1987) projects non-advanced further education student numbers for England to the year 2000. In full-time equivalent terms, it postulates a fall from a 1986 base figure of between four per cent to seven per cent by 1990 and between nine per cent to 14 per cent by 1994, when a 'trough' will be reached. Results will vary. In some places new industry and homes will compensate for the shortfall; in others the reductions will be greater than the mean figures suggest.



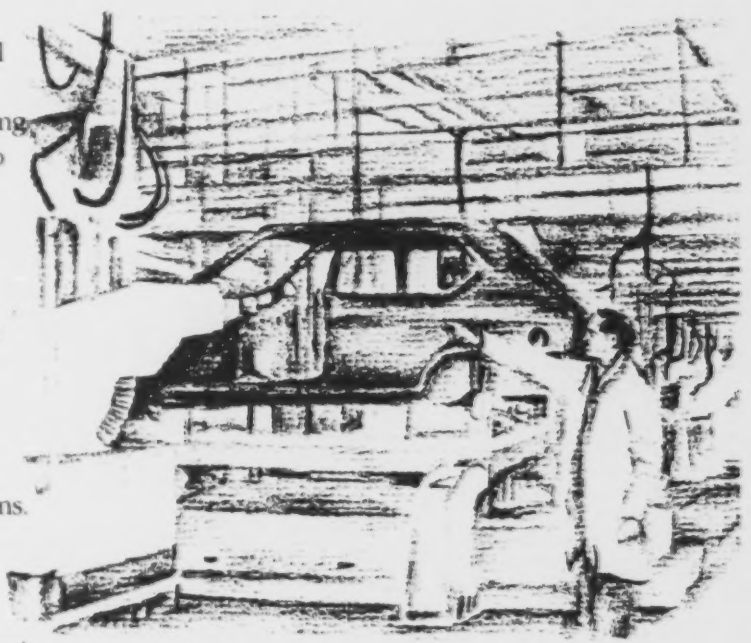
Declining traditional markets have inevitably increased public sector competition. Many further education colleges have

already felt the impact of schools moving up-market and can expect a down-market thrust from higher education institutions, as their own markets are increasingly trawled by universities.

Private sector competition is growing. Training agencies have already penetrated college markets. Employers are attracted to such agencies because they are seen as part of the work environment and able to deliver more rapidly than colleges. (See **Employers on Colleges: Have They Got It Right?**, p 31)

There are relatively untapped markets, but they differ from the traditional kinds. Reaching these markets requires an understanding of client needs and a willingness to think the unthinkable about provision. Adults - the great hope for many colleges - often have private commitments (jobs, partners, children) which restrict their availability. Education and training for parents generally has to be part-time and fitted around work and school. Adults also need teaching approaches different from those which work with the 16-19 age group.

Managers expect to work in settings more congenial than those provided by most colleges. Workers require training on equipment many colleges do not possess, which accounts for the growing demand for workplace provision. For employers, on-the-job training ensures attendance and reduces travel costs. For colleges, there is a need to upgrade accommodation or deploy staff away from the campus: both have important resourcing implications.



For some years now, colleges have been forced to accept more and more earmarked funding from multiple sources. This strengthens the buyer's hand by enabling him or her to play one provider off against another and to impose customisation requirements. This trend is likely to continue.

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Employers on Colleges: Have They Got It Right?

Before starting its Responsive College project, Birmingham Education Department commissioned a survey of employer perceptions of its nine colleges. This activity involved over 40 interviews and revealed five repeated criticisms.

College syllabuses and systems were seen as inflexible. Employers felt they had to work under commercial pressures which college staff didn't appreciate. Colleges were viewed as overconfident of their market position. It was claimed that lecturers often failed to update their knowledge and skills. Some employers were convinced that colleges made little effort to identify the real needs of companies.

How valid are such observations? Are they true only of Birmingham? Five rather different projects conducted comparable inquiries.

COULD DO BETTER

The Gwynedd project (three colleges in a rural setting with many small firms) sought employer views as part of an enquiry into training needs involving 50 engineering employer interviews and a postal survey of 409 firms (70 returns).

Respondents were nearly unanimous in their praise of lecturing staff, but only a third thought colleges were providing a good service. There were recurring comments about the need for improved employer liaison, and complaints about poor marketing and college inflexibility.

Among firms currently using local colleges, 40 per cent suggested course improvements. Several employers regarded general studies as a waste of time, and problems with transport and discipline were recorded.

NO CAPTIVE MARKET

With help from the Engineering Employers' Federation, the Sheffield project identified 50 firms (large/medium/small, users/non-users of its five colleges) in which to conduct in-depth interviews. Any ideas about colleges enjoying a captive market were here dispelled by learning that nearly nine-tenths of the companies used private trainers.

About a third would regularly contact colleges for help with a training problem, and similar proportions sometimes or never. The majority viewed colleges as 'fairly responsive' to their needs, as offering the right type of courses 'for some groups' and as providing 'good' value for money - all relatively positive perceptions.

This survey also tried to identify what employers saw as barriers to the use of college provision. Nearly half suggested that colleges are too committed to long courses, whereas employers want short, job-specific provision. Some advocated more modular offerings.

Almost as large a proportion (nearly half) were put off by the timing of courses and by the course content. Over a third had reservations about staff knowledge. Place of delivery was not seen as crucial by many.

Two-thirds of these companies had no training department, and of these most had no one responsible for training.

Opportunities for the college could be said to exist in abundance.

NOT SUITABLE FOR ADULTS

The Strathclyde project concentrated on employer users of its three colleges, inverviewing 14 and posting questionnaires to another 154 (49 returns). From these, nearly 90 per cent carried out in-house training and almost two-thirds used private providers. Although 40 per cent had visited colleges in the past year, only 30 per cent had been visited by college staff. While more than three-quarters regarded colleges as in touch with industry and almost all saw them as offering good value for money, other constraints emerged.

Many employers - even those enjoying good relationships with local colleges - seemed to perceive them as places where 16-19 year olds could obtain qualifications, but as inappropriate for adults. There was criticism of college selling and promotion, of prospectuses with inadequate course content detail and too much educational jargon.

Telephone contact with colleges, except to principals and depute principals, was described as 'difficult'. Employers wanted more rapid notification of student absenteeism.

A HIDDEN CURRICULUM

The Dudley project (three colleges in a metropolitan borough) undertook a thorough 'census' of the engineering industry in its area, drawing upon questionnaire data from 871 firms and 277 in-depth follow-up interviews. The public image of colleges among engineering firms was poor. Colleges were viewed as not providing relevant courses, as having out-of-date equipment and staff, as unresponsive, uncommunicative and unwilling to listen to industrialists: 'their attitude is *take-it-or-leave-it, you take what we provide*...

Furthermore, colleges were rarely mentioned in any positive way. Private training agents were noted more often than colleges and more highly rated as contributors to training. The Manpower Services Commission was seen as the prime initiator of anything to do with training.

Still more disturbing was the perception that colleges offer a 'soft-option', a 'cushy' environment for trainees, one 'distanced from the world of work', altogether amounting to a 'take-it-easy hidden curriculum' and 'a bad, counter-productive, learning experience for trainees'. Firms were not attracted to long periods of 'off-the-job' training because they had no faith in the colleges' ability to produce a work-orientated environment.

TRYING TO MAKE CONTACT

A fifth project, which (understandably?) wants to remain anonymous, interviewed 150 employers running small businesses. Their complaints about the LEA's five colleges revealed many problem areas.

Telephone callers encountered difficulties with: prolonged telephone ringing, telephonists unaware of the details of any course, the unavailability of anyone to answer the caller's questions, leaving messages which took days for a response - or were unacknowledged.

Employer visitors found reception areas 'choked' with young students. The receptionist might be busy on the telephone and hence appear to be ignoring the visitor. The receptionist was unaware of details about specific courses and unable to contact a suitable member of staff. There was nowhere for an employer to wait in comfortable surroundings and no private room for employer and tutor to talk.

Colleges were a maze to a first-time visitor. There was need for an uncluttered notice board in the foyer.

NOT UNIVERSAL, BUT COMMONPLACE

Of course, not all employers were disenchanted with their local colleges. Some were enthusiastic, and a complaint advanced by one employer might be refuted by another.

Many criticisms advanced against colleges can also be directed towards parts of other service industries: banking, law, caring, hotels, catering, public transport, etc. Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to conclude that there is no cause for college concern.

What is presented above is drawn from more than 1,500 employer sources. The complaints may not be universal, but they are commonplace.

PERSISTENT WORRIES

If one takes a broad view, it becomes apparent that there is growing evidence of employer disapproval of colleges under four general headings.

There is a **fundamental incompatibility between college and business 'cultures'**, so that the classroom and workplace are seen as different worlds. Employers detect in colleges evidence of an ivory-tower existence: short working weeks and years, job security and salary guarantees protecting staff from market-place risks, out-of-date lecturers unaware of today's business world, old-fashioned equipment, ideological commitments which are anti-commerce and which are contemptuous of the work world, etc.

Colleges are unbusinesslike at the operational level. They are unorganised and unsystematic. Decision making is tortuously slow and involves elaborate committee structures. Lead times are protracted. It is difficult to make contact with individuals who have answers.

Too often colleges **expect their customers to fit into what is on offer**. Colleges like selling long, award-bearing courses which start in September, take place during weekdays (but not Christmas, Easter or July/August), are constructed in multiples of years, and are concerned to 'educate for a lifetime'. Industry wants short courses available around the calendar and focussed on the company's immediate training needs.

The college may be an appropriate place for school-leavers but it **does not offer an adult environment**. The physical setting gives evidence of another culture clash, between teenagers and adults. The buildings are dirty and untended. There are broken windows and furniture. Heating is erratic. The ambiance is adolescent.

DEALING WITH BELIEFS

The extent and importance of the above criticisms varies in employer interviews, but the same points are made regularly across the country. It is not merely that colleges 'could do better' but that private-sector providers - often funded with public-sector money - are perceived as actually doing very much better.

In one project, the results of the employer survey were greeted with anger by staff who insisted that the comments were unfair, untrue and unsubstantiated. Pressure was applied for the material to be written up more 'positively'.

Such reactions are understandable. They come at a time when colleges are already under fire and attempting to survive in shrinking markets. But resentment is somewhat beside the point.

In the market-place, buyers are under no obligation to achieve an accurate assessment of the provider. **What matters is what customers believe**. At a practical level, the customer is always right. If the customer has got it wrong, the college has a public relations problem.

Sources: Crowson/Chapman, Doherty/Woodhall, Howie/Traynor (1987), Jones/Dunkin.

At the same time, colleges are being continually pressed to perform more efficiently. In non-advanced further education (DES/WO, 1987) over-all student staff ratios in England have risen from 9.4:1 in the 1979/80 session to 10.3:1 in the 1985/86 session. Current proposals suggest that this should move to 11.4:1 by 1991/92. This means that colleges have to think in terms of recruiting larger, more economically viable teaching groups at a time of shrinking demand, unless, of course, they can price more flexibly or generate compensating income from their own commercial activities.

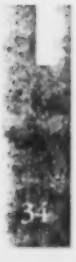
The results of the above pressures - shrinking conventional markets, increased competition, new funding arrangements - mean that unless new markets are developed within the next few years, we can anticipate more contractions, amalgamations, closures, and redundancies. In some areas, these have begun. Marketing is therefore a requirement for survival.

Conversely, in colleges or departments where business is booming, there may be little interest in marketing. Organisations faced with more demand than they can supply seldom show much concern for customer needs, since demand is taken (and not unreasonably) to imply that needs are being met. Such smugness is not universal. Large colleges encompass areas of both decreasing and increasing demand. For every under-recruiting course there is usually another which is over-recruiting. The result is that college commitment to marketing is likely to be variable.

How effective is marketing?

Marketing is not a panacea. At best, it is an attempt to bridge the gap between what the provider has on offer or might be encouraged to make available, and what the customer might be prepared to buy.

Marketing is not, and cannot be, an exact science. The market-place is unpredictable and difficult to interpret. It is also large, complex and inconsistent. There are predatory competitors. Sudden fluctuations in demand can leave the marketeer with products he cannot sell. Much of marketing is about speculation, investment and risk. Not all marketing thrusts are winners. The market-place knows success and failure.



Marketing is costly. A college which sets out to market itself encounters additional work, which requires additional resources. Penetrating existing markets more deeply and opening up new markets require effort. Someone, somewhere has to pay, either by reallocating or adding to existing resources.

For all of these reasons, college marketing is likely to remain on trial for some years. Project funding and management support may smooth its way into the institution, but marketing will have to justify its existence. That means arresting decline, diverting disaster, delivering students. A new marketeer needs to become identified with more successes than failures in order to gain credibility. College marketeers have to market themselves and their services within the college.

Who should do the marketing?

With a new task like marketing, the usual college reaction is to adopt a 'part-time' solution, i.e. to employ people to teach *and* market. This ensures that new support activities do not leave the control of teachers, and that the hegemony of teacher interests is preserved. It also ensures that the new activity retains amateur status.

In confronting this strange practice, the Audit Commission (1985) notes that many colleges

> *...are sizeable operations in their own right, with a cost base appropriate to companies with sales of £5m a year or more. Such companies would have one or two senior executives assigned* full time *to understanding the market they are seeking to serve and devising ways in which their products can be made attractive and relevant to changing market needs. Colleges face similar challenges and require similar expertise.*

Every college needs at least one professional marketeer, someone devoted exclusively to marketing and not tied to teaching or other activities. This person should be appropriately senior in status and have considerable professional skills and qualities. In a report carried out for a local education authority (LEA), a private sector marketing agency (HR & H Marketing Services Ltd., 1987) makes the following recommendations about the person in charge of college marketing:

Irrespective of the title, be it marketing manager, director of marketing or head of marketing, he or she should:

- *Be at HoD/Director level and very much a member of the Senior Management Team.*
- *Be willing and able to accept responsibility.*
- *Be able to co-ordinate activity cross college.*
- *Be knowledgeable about and, ideally, qualified in marketing.*
- *Be a good communicator - both internally and externally.*
- *Be experienced in editorial typewriting.*
- *Be at home with the media.*
- *Understand advertising.*
- *Be disciplined.*
- *Be capable of working under pressure.*
- *Be able both to motivate and to delegate.*

The reality is often less impressive. One finds (see opposite) marketing posts advertised at a variety of professional levels and marketeers working at considerable disadvantage in some colleges.

A central thrust of Government initiatives in the 1980s has been pressure for college (rather than departmental) orientations. Seven units marketing themselves independently produce seven different approaches, attitudes, value systems. They also present an amateurish image to the customer. Sharing marketing responsibilities across academic cost centres is ineffective because the college should be marketing the totality of its services.

If marketing is to work effectively, the college requires an appropriately resourced unit or department. This includes support services, an office, a telephone, and a budget, as well as provision for travel and entertaining. In larger colleges, and/or where the LEA offers no marketing support services, the college may need to employ more than one marketeer.

Marketing Manager:

Head of Department Grade IV

- ★ Permanent .5 (half-time) appointments at L1 in:–
  - COMPUTER AIDED ART and DESIGN (CAD)
  - DRAMA
  - ENGINEERING
  - SCIENCE
  - SECRETARIAL STUDIES
- ★ MARKETING CO-ORDINATOR – a permanent .5 appointment.

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND CO-ORDINATOR OF EXTERNAL FUNDING (PRINCIPAL LECTURER)

Ref. ED/23

A dynamic educationalist is required to take total responsibility for the college marketing unit and for the co-ordination of external funding work from research to presentation of final submissions/ bids.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF MARKETING (Ref 8G1)

Required to join a lively team in the Marketing, Research and Development Unit.

Substantial experience in the Marketing of Further Education is essential particularly in relation to market research and the development of information systems and databases.

Applicants should be graduates and/or hold a relevant professional qualification.

Marketing Co-ordinator

for the College (Head of Department Grade III post).

The person appointed will be required to market existing and new courses held at the College and assist in the development of new initiatives. Applicants should preferably have had marketing experience and be familar with the further education system.

INSTITUTE MARKETING OFFICER

This is a large and diverse institution of some 11,000 students more than 2,000 of whom are studying at advanced level. We wish to appoint a Marketing Officer who will be responsible for promotional strategy, embracing both the Institute's general image and its relationship with all sectors of the potential client market.

The successful applicant will have a wide knowledge of the educational system, a successful teaching record and an understanding of current curricular developments in further education. He or she will also be able to establish credibility with senior Institute staff and with all client groups including employers and schools.

The appointment will be made at Senior Lecturer Grade but the conditions of service will be those of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical Staff. Salary scales are under review, but the current scale for Senior Lecturer grade is £12,615 to £14,820. Placing on the scale is dependent on qualifications and experience.

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All such appointments need not be from among (ex-)teachers. Much marketing activity involves menial work. Questionnaire design may demand exceptional skills, but much of what follows does not: addressing, filling and posting envelopes, reading items to respondents, keying in data, etc. It makes no sense to pay someone £23,000 for 38 weeks to do work appropriate to someone employed for 47 weeks at £7,000. Nor need all college marketing activity be done within the college. It is sometimes more efficient and effective to buy in outside help.

Within the college the marketeer needs to report to the principal as chief executive of the college. This is likely to make the marketeer an important colleague, not least because he/she has immediate access to more information about the market-place than anyone else. Moreover, unless the marketing unit is supported by the principal it cannot function effectively. Investing in marketing without backing the results is like buying financial advice while keeping one's money under the mattress.

The principal can sometimes be a marketing liability. To the customer, a personal contact is the most important person in the college. Formal institutional status has no meaning. Obvious as this may seem, one still finds advertising, prospectuses and even business cards in which the identity of the principal is given prominence over that of the contact - a practice which would appear absurd in any other service sector.

This underscores the importance of helping everyone working in the college - from principal to caretaker - to understand what marketing is and is not. General awareness-raising is essential when a marketing approach is introduced. Everyone who relates to customers can be said to play some kind of marketing role. Some staff have specific marketing functions which form a fundamental part of their roles: telephonists and receptionists are the first point customer-college contact. Few receive any kind of training in customer relations.

Not all marketing activity need be college based. In LEAs with only one college no alternative may exist, but in other places local authorities have

established their own marketing units. At the time of writing there are indications (not least because of the new Education Act) that LEA-college relationships are about to evolve in new directions. What these will be is unlikely to become clear for some time, but in the meantime we need to note the main arguments for LEA marketing units.

Even if the future brings some opting out by LEA schools and movement towards corporate status in colleges, at present LEAs run both, and better marketing data would enable them to perform their stewardship more effectively. Competition can waste public monies. LEA marketing units can mediate between institutions on an informed basis and limit the disadvantages of competition.

Economies of scale are possible, particularly in marketing research for colleges which draw from approximately the same locality. This can avoid repetition of tasks and permit the sharing of important marketing data. Present arrangements also require LEAs to produce non-advanced further education development plans and these need marketing data. Although they can ask colleges to supply information, LEAs need a market overview which is more than the sum of a group of college perspectives.

The long-term fate of LEA units is difficult to forecast. One notes in some LEAs a rush towards centralised marketing at the very moment when their control over local institutions is most threatened. It remains unclear whether the main impetus is defensiveness or conviction. Where a unit exists the college would be foolish not to cooperate and benefit from it. At the same time, even with an LEA unit, the marketing college will require its own marketeer and its own unit, although the resourcing level of the latter may be correspondingly reduced.

Whether colleges can market themselves better with LEA support is debatable. What is clear is that LEAs cannot market their provision without the active cooperation of colleges, and, in particular, principals. LEAs may (and do) bring pressure to bear on principals, but pressure can be resisted.

However, the major explanation for the dominance of college over LEA in the market equation lies not in politics, but in the market-place: most college customers have little if any contact with the LEA,

except for the important matter of grant aid. The LEA - like college management and even the college marketing unit - is a support service, an enabling arrangement. Real responsiveness to customer needs is not delivered in offices where administrators, managers and marketeers work, but at the point where learner and teacher come together: in the classroom and the workplace, on the field trip.

It is important to recall the larger context. Colleges cater for between 2,000 and 25,000 full-time and part-time students. Some LEAs have many colleges, and hence hundreds of thousands of students. Most (and sometimes all) of what goes on in the interactions between learners and teachers is invisible to the tiny group of managers and administrators charged with running the system. This is an irony much reflected upon by 'ordinary teachers'. In order to know what is actually happening in classrooms, those responsible for effective and efficient course delivery have to construct a management information system which allows at least a sample of the vast reality to be glimpsed. Marketing is not only about identifying customer needs, but also ensuring that those needs are being met. Eventually, customers open packages.

What does college marketing cost?

The answer is more than is generally realised. Financial costs and constraints are not always apparent because colleges seldom cost their own activities. There is a tendency to assume that staff, accommodation, heating, lighting, etc. are free, and additional marginal costs represent the whole resource picture. In addition, the proliferation of Government funded projects has enabled colleges to undertake work which would normally have been beyond available budgets.

There is also a hidden college economy. The use of remission for administrative/managerial tasks and replacement by part-time teaching budgets further blurs real costing. External funding has encouraged the enterprising manager to look around for 'a spare pair of hands' to be applied to a task which is not really part of the project agreement. Professional enthusiasm sometimes leads lecturers to undertake marketing activities in their own time and without additional recompense. The extent of such activity is difficult to quantify.

It is however a mistake in a marketing approach to assume that money does not matter, or that funding will somehow materialise. Major marketing efforts need to be costed in not hundreds, but thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of pounds. Even when external funding is available, the results are seldom trouble-free. There is a tendency for those involved with projects to expect universal transformation from a shoestring budget. The explanation lies in enthusiasm tinged with *naïveté*. Disappointment is inevitable, and attempted face-saving by unbelievable claims almost certain. Trying to get more than the money can buy is a persistent problem in college marketing.

Those responsible for marketing activity at LEA and college levels desperately need to grasp the real cost of achievement: what can one expect for £2,000 or £20,000? How much does it cost for lecturers to visit 50 employers? At what point does expenditure on college prospectuses become unjustified? Is it really cheaper to do it (e.g. the video, the course leaflet, the marketing survey) in-house with untrained (and slow) staff than to pay for external assistance? Those who promote the marketing activity of others might also benefit, particularly with reference to developmental activities, from accepting that not all investments bear handsome returns.

As leaders of LEA/college units, marketeers need to be well paid, not merely to give them the status to work as peers with senior colleagues, but because (as the market knows) you get what you pay for. Even when unit heads are properly recompensed, their activities can be under-resourced. There are many one-(wo)man-and-a-dog enterprises, with the marketeer expected to do 'some teaching', research the market, monitor employer liaison, run open days, go out on selling trips and undertake a wide range of other tasks. Budgets can be small or invisible, with money provided piecemeal and the marketeer uncertain how much to spend. In order to succeed, college marketing - like teaching - has to become a professional activity, a properly resourced specialism.

Penny-pinching all too often leads to foreseeable and avoidable disaster. Too many

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college marketing operations are run on the dynamism and commitment of entrepreneurial individuals. In one way this is cost effective: management gets more than its money would buy on the open market. In another way, there are implicit problems. The enthusiastic marketeer has a tendency to concentrate less on creating a transferable system (systems require resources) than on personal networks which rely on a single personality: when that personality moves on, little is left. Nothing has been recorded. There was no time to create files and nowhere to place them. Relationships which have been carefully nurtured evaporate.

The bureaucratic rigidity and hierarchical pay differentials which obsess the teaching fraternity tend to focus on the value of the post rather than the postholder. Thus knowledge and contacts built up over several years vanish as the lecturer moves from X-shire (where he/she knows everything and everybody) to Y-shire (where he/she starts over). The point is that marketing is not solely about form filling and computer data inputing. Knowledge represents an investment, and one which is too often lost when it need not have been.

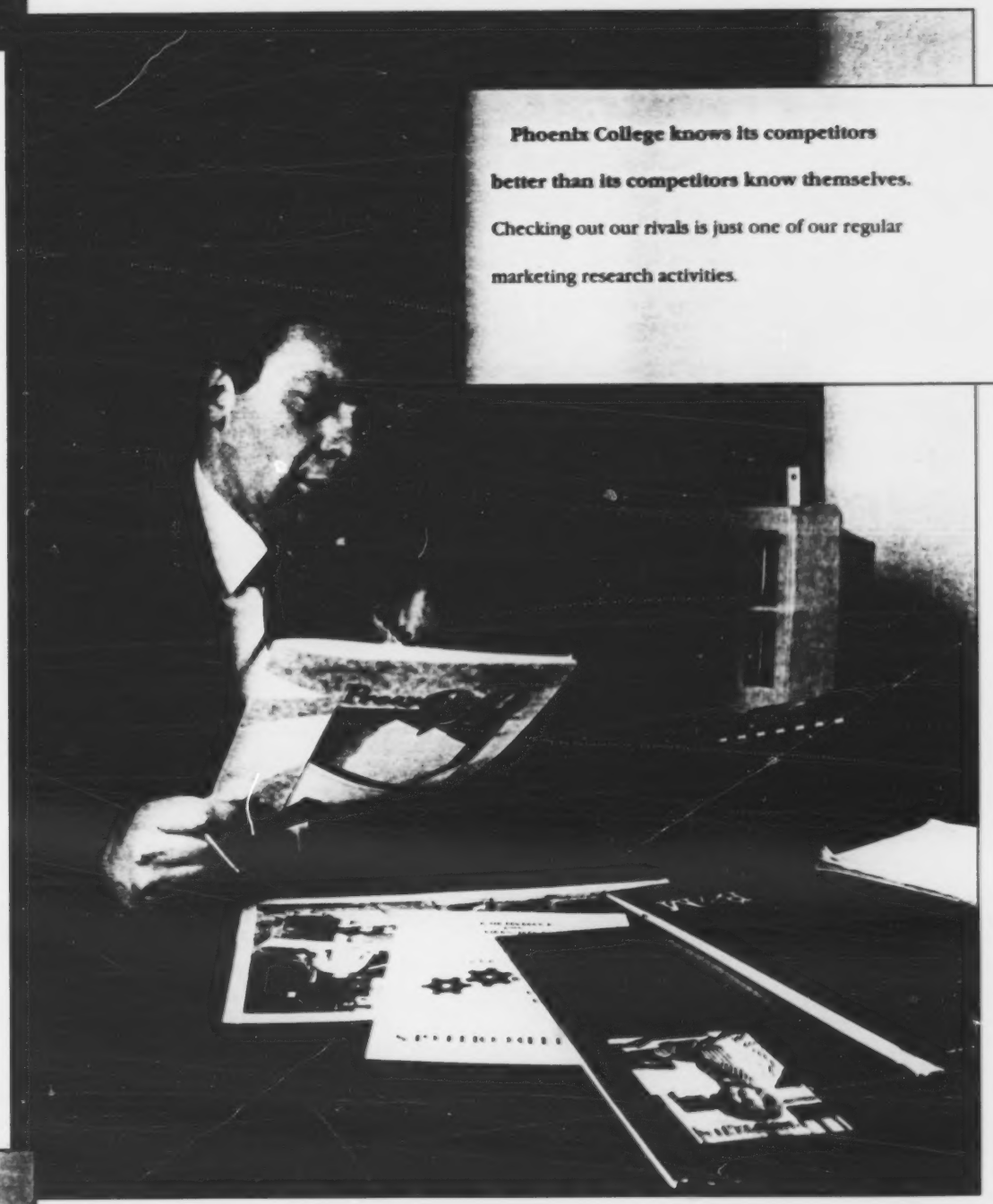
Marketing and the responsive college

What should be clear from the above is that this volume starts from the assumption that college responsiveness centres on marketing. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that marketing is solely about structures and systems, that all that is required is a unit with a well paid head who has been given good staff and a reasonable budget and who can help the college set up a management information system and prepare a marketing plan. Something more is needed.

A college can be said to have accepted marketing to the extent that the bulk of its staff (teaching and support) have moved from a provider-centred to a customer-centred approach. College staff - no more than bankers, solicitors, traders and brokers - cannot be expected to perform as saints. Staff, too, have interests, including self. They also have obligations and responsibilities which extend beyond the college. What the marketeer requires to perform effectively is colleague support and understanding. Marketing is about bridging the gap between provider and customer for the benefit of both.

Chapter 2

Marketing Research



Phoenix College knows its competitors better than its competitors know themselves.

Checking out our rivals is just one of our regular marketing research activities.

Teaching preparation at Phoenix College isn't always something you go away and do in the library. Many of our lecturers start off by going to the workplace where the benefits of the course will be felt.

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arketing Research

Market research is information gathered about the market-place. In its pure form it results in neutral information: how to interpret and act upon it are not researcher concerns. In the Spring of 1987 a Manpower Services Commission market intelligence unit issued a bulletin based on a 1986 survey:

> *Out of...250 different occupational shortages...the most commonly mentioned, regionally, was for welders. The national picture showed at a higher level a shortage of professional engineers, notably electronic engineers, and computing professionals, while at other levels there were reports of shortages of machinists and welders.*

Make of this what you will. The information could be said to reveal threats to employers and opportunities for trainers. Or not. Skills shortages are difficult to explain. A lack of workers can result from too few skilled people, but it can also be caused by low pay, poor working conditions, expensive housing or transport problems.

Marketing research, on the other hand, involves data which can be interpreted so as to assist managers in deciding what to put on sale. The difference is sometimes one of kind but always one of purpose.

On their own, the data quoted above are too general to serve a marketing purpose. A marketeer needs harder evidence before urging a course of action on the college. He/she wants to know whether the shortage represents a rejection by, or a lack of, trained workers; if the latter, an estimate of how many, and some indication of whether provision will attract trainees; and if training competitors will pose a serious threat. Too many uncertainties remain.

At first sight the distinction might seem academic, but recording market-place behaviour nationally and regionally is not the

same as deciding where to invest money in a local (college) business. The differences between market and marketing research are those which distinguish description from prescription, analysis from action, reflection from risk.

A conceptual framework for marketing research

The college is not the sole provider. There are *competitors*. *Customers* can choose where to go and what to buy. The *context (or market-place)* determines what is possible. These three components form a *marketing triad*, a complex inter-relationship which can be characterised (Figure 2) as the THREE Cs.

Each point of the triad depends on the other two. A customer can buy only courses which exist or can be commissioned. A course cannot ensure customers. Nor can we be certain that a competing course will not appear a better buy. Unless all three points are in accord, no sale will take place.

When customers are scarce, the marketeer wants to know whether the problem lies in the context (a dearth of applicants), with the customer (demographic changes) or the competition (better promotion, more attractive offerings), or two or all. Some falls in demand can be reversed by more aggressive selling, reduced prices, or tapping new markets. Where new provision is possible, a marketeer wants assurance that conditions are favourable, that the market-place wants the course, potential customers exist, and the competition has not already cornered the market.

Aggressive selling and new courses have resource implications, and the marketeer needs to know that demands can be met. Who will provide new staff, equipment and space? The institution has a product range (or 'mix'), and new offerings may have to compete within the college with other possibilities: is construction or information techology to be preferred?

Choices involve risk. The marketeer may advise, but decisions are taken by managers and demand a balance between flair and caution, confidence and fear. In order to achieve this, managers need what the marketeer alone can provide: marketing data.

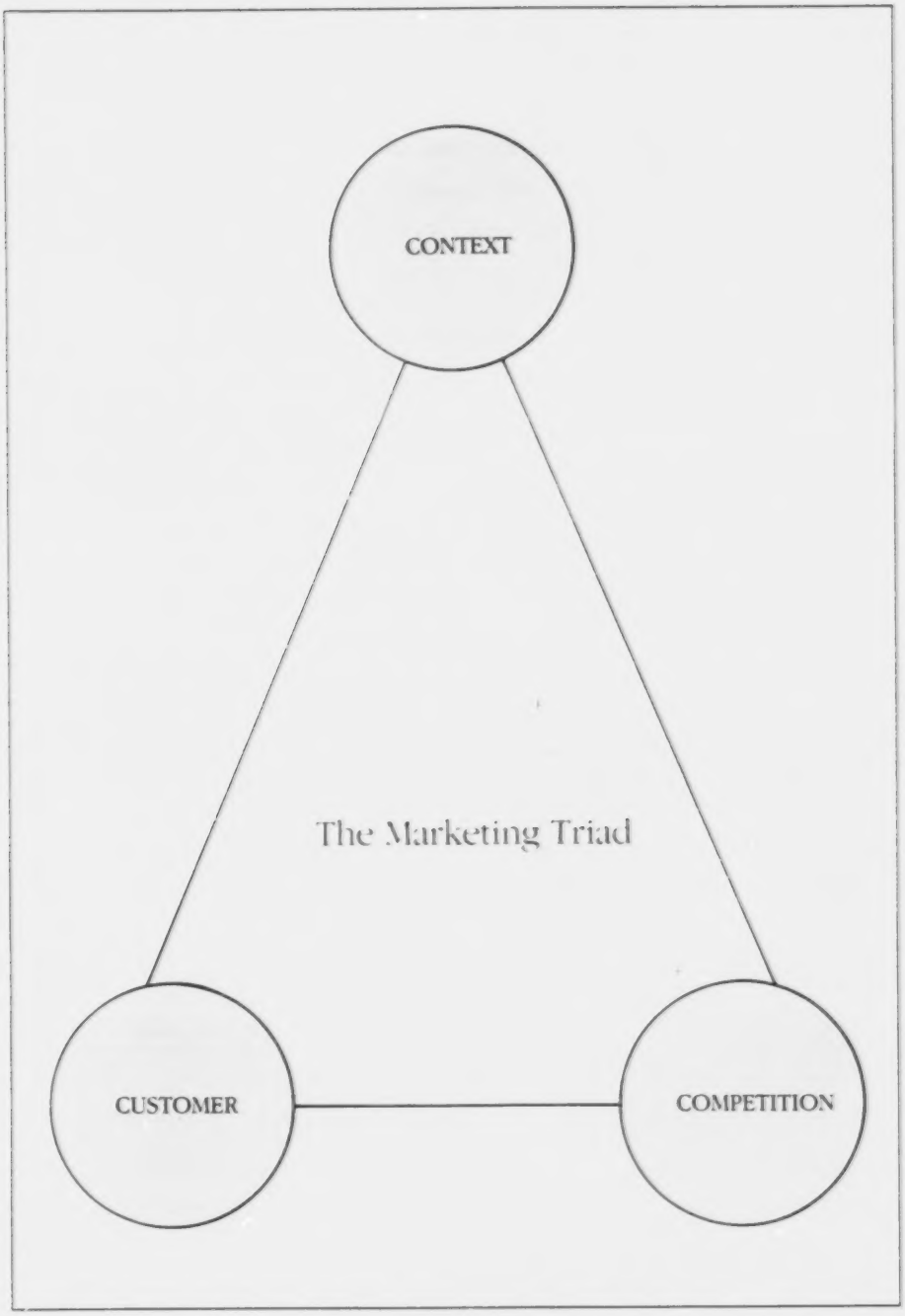

Figure 2. The Marketing Triad, the Three Cs.

Researching the context

Colleges draw customers from contexts which vary from course to course. Some recruit nationally, others internationally. For our purpose, the college context - its catchment area or market-place - is the 'travel-to-learn' locality. Even this can be large and complex. Many kinds of data are collected about the context by academics and Government and private sector agencies.

Longer-term work (*econometric studies*) identifies ten-year employment needs and is based on population, labour force, productivity, consumption, and overall output data. Surveys of the more immediate locality (*environmental scanning*) highlight the latest information about economic trends, labour markets and political climate - all useful background material for course development. *Extrapolation studies* analyse past trends and hypothesise how their continuance or modification might impact on the organisation. *Employer surveys* identify future training needs based on employer evidence. Other kinds of studies concentrate on only one occupation (*job survey*) across many employment settings or (*industry survey*) identify possible jobs (engineers, accountants, secretaries, gardeners, etc.) within a single industry. *Job vacancy studies* combine econometric studies with local or regional data to analyse present employment needs.

A great deal of information is available, but the marketeer's problem is specificity, i.e. turning market research into marketing research. If we think in terms of a funnel (Figure 3), more general data lie in the wider zones at the top, and more specific data within the lower, narrower zones. The bottom of the funnel represents the point at which marketing decisions are taken. What the manager needs is data in which broad trends have been focussed to reveal the implications for the college. Banking may be a national growth industry, but if banks are leaving the catchment area to relocate, the result will be a loss of business for the college.

Secondary research: threats and opportunities

The college's catchment area is complex, changing, and difficult to describe. There can be between 15,000 and 25,000 employers, which makes comprehensive research prohibitively expensive. Additionally,

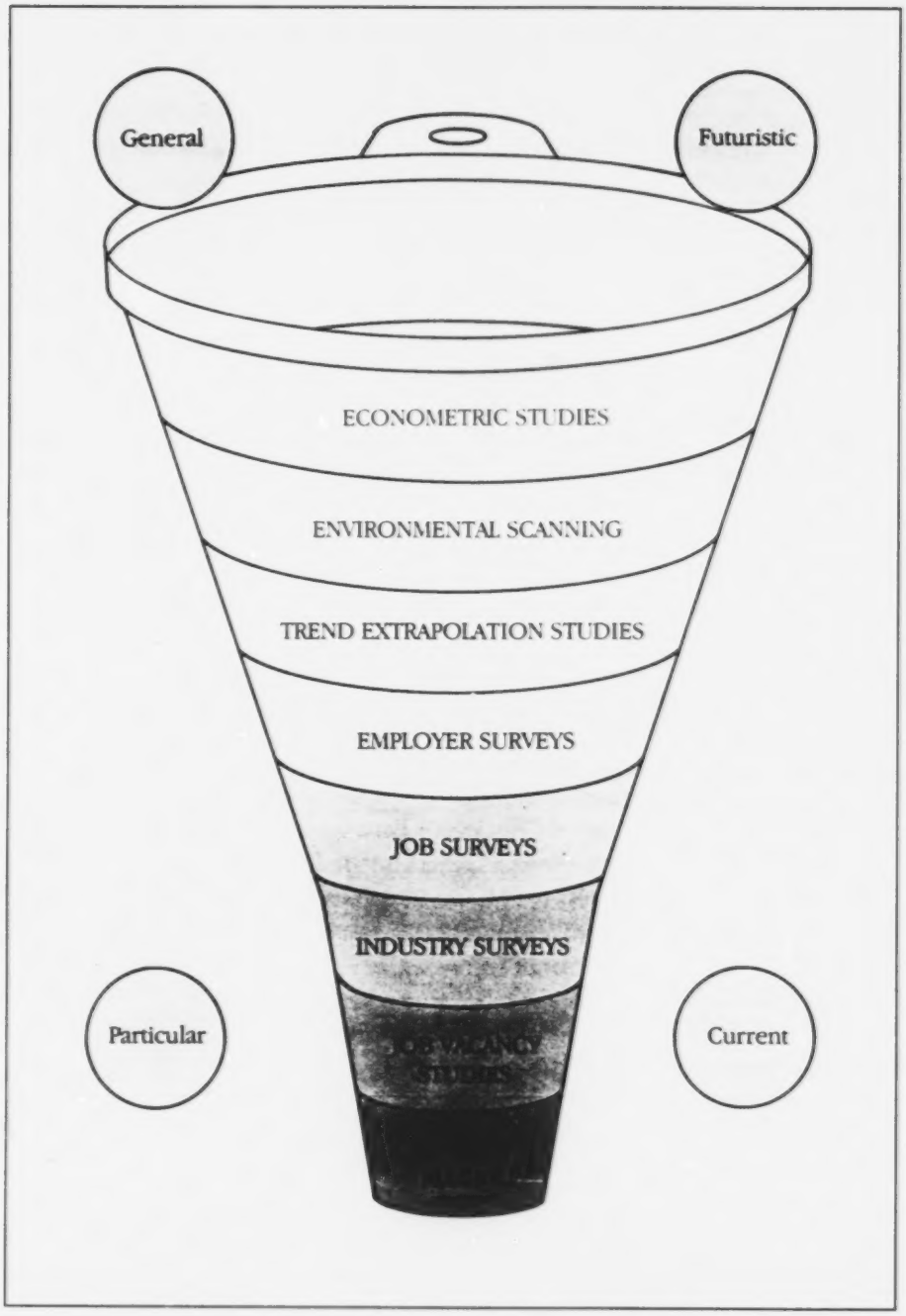

Figure 3. Information and the decision-making funnel.

the college is not resourced to track shifts in the community's social, economic and political features. The marketeer will have to draw upon the work of others.

Others will have collected data for their own purposes. At some stage this will almost certainly have involved primary research in that someone contacted someone else. However, once primary research is published, it becomes secondary research. Thus the distinction is between whether you gather data yourself or obtain them from someone else. If the latter, they are unlikely to fit your immediate needs, so that, if you want to be certain, you will have to check out the indications emerging from secondary research by doing some primary research.

At best secondary research can offer *marketing indicators*, pointers in the direction of potential threats or opportunities. Managers would be unwise to draw conclusions and promote investment without further evidence, because the data are too general.

College researchers have a growing number of secondary data sources to call upon. The Employment Department: Training Agency offers a Computer Assisted Local Labour Market Information (CALLMI) system with a brief which includes identifying training needs. Many LEAs have economic development units whose responsibilities cover training needs. Chambers of Commerce have information about training needs. LEA development plans require knowledge about training needs. Local Employer Networks are expected to acquire detailed information about training needs. Job centres and careers officers have information about vacancies. Managing agencies and enterprise agencies have many employer contacts. Some industries have training boards. Scores of specialist journals offer pointers to current developments. And so on...

One problem is the need to select from a mountain of material. A medium-sized college can offer courses in nine employment sectors for which hundreds of data sources exist. Reading through so much material is a task beyond the scope of a college unit. Even with an LEA unit whose resources are shared among many colleges, the need for selection is inevitable.

A second difficulty is the nature of the information provided by these sources. Most of it is national or regional rather than local -

fascinating to civil servants and policy makers sitting astride the system, but of less use in running a single college. Even when the data are local and intended to be specific, there can be a geographical mismatch between college catchment area and researcher definition of the local labour market.

The problem may not even be an absence of information. CALLMI provides a continually updated survey of a representative 30 per cent of the local workforce via interviews with their employers, but the data are confidential unless the employer agrees otherwise. In practice, CALLMI information is aggregated to form larger and larger multiples so that detail is lost. Data thus move upwards towards greater and greater generalisation, from the bottom to the top of our funnel, and the focus is further emphasised by the practice of providing *more* data at higher levels of abstraction. Training Agency regional offices issue quarterly labour market reports, and area offices only annual reports.

The consequences are neatly illustrated in a Cleveland planning document (MSC VET Group, 1987) which provides 45 pages on the national scene, 10 on the northern region and five on Cleveland, with the latter offering little which could prompt positive managerial activity in a college, e.g.

> *Visits were made to 43 employers in the construction industry ...Although employers could not forecast further workforce reductions, they were equally unsure about possible future increases as orders were very uncertain due to the contractual nature of their industry.*

The attendant problems have been much observed and commented upon. In a study of LEA development plans, Fletcher (1987) pinpoints the dilemma:

> *It appears to have proved difficult to draw clear links between labour market data and course provision. The better plans try hard to identify key trends and most LEAs seem agreed that areas of potential growth include information technology, catering and tourism and electronic engineering. Such information can however give only a general steer to provision, and if improvements in Manpower Services Commission output can only provide yet more general information about the*

employment structure it will not make the planning process either easier or more precise.

A glimmer of hope lies in establishing pooling arrangements between CALLMI and other organisations, based on cooperation in both collecting and sharing data. Some LEAs and colleges are now exploring the possibilities.

Until such arrangements become commonplace, the more conventional secondary sources can provide marketing indicators about the community. Since the information is freely and easily available, it would be pointless to ignore it. Market research is a useful basis on which to make judgements about marketing research. For action and investment, the latter is needed.

Calling upon external agencies

Somewhere between desk research and talking to employers there is the possibility of drawing upon knowledgeable people who work in external agencies. CALLMI staff interview employers. Job centres and careers officers are informed of vacancies. Managing agencies and enterprise agencies have information about small businesses.

Such data have limitations. For example, job centres are notified of about 30 per cent of vacancies, but this is sometimes thought to be a guesstimate. Even if it were not, no one could know how the sample differed from the remaining 70 per cent. What the marketeer is likely to get from an external agency is *soft information*, data representing someone's impression, albeit taken from a well informed person.

Most employer marketing information is of course subjective. Firmness is a distinction of degree rather than kind. Some data (from surveys) are inter-subjective and involve many individuals, while other information (comments from a careers officer) may be a private evaluation. There is nevertheless a difference in the rigour with which collection is conducted: the harder variety is gathered more methodically by more reliable techniques over a shorter period from a more limited field.

The personal perceptions of well informed individuals are most useful *as a preliminary to checking out harder information.*

Having undertaken secondary research, a marketeer should visit or telephone external agencies to confirm that marketing indicators are supported by the experience of others. Only then ought he/she to decide to undertake primary research, when there is evidence of unmet needs of adequate volume to justify college interest.

Primary research: an expensive necessity

Eventually someone has to decide whether to add to, expand or contract college courses. The strong hints derived from secondary research and talking to external agency staff need to be confirmed by contacting employers. Colleges and LEA marketing units have a wide range of approaches to this work.

Employer training needs analysis involves visiting an employer to identify training requirements. This is potentially beneficial to both parties. The employer can acquire 'expert' advice while the consultant can gain marketing information and an opportunity to sell college services. The advice can also be paid for, either by the employer or the Training Agency, which (at the time of writing) part-funds consultancies.

Attractive as this option may appear, there are problems. There is the question of lecturer competence. If staff need updating through industrial secondments, they are, by definition, out of touch with the workplace. Their use as consultants would dent college credibility. Training needs analysis involves procedures and methodologies which may be unfamiliar to those with recent workplace experience. Even with appropriate staff, what is known as *full and formal identification of training needs* can occupy up to a fortnight in a large firm, and colleges have problems in deploying staff for such periods at short notice.

For all these reasons, colleges usually offer micro, rather than macro, consultancy services, concentrating on *informal needs analysis* directed towards specific areas of activity which the employer already suspects have training requirements.

Employer visits have been much advocated in recent years. Colleges have been urged 'to go to employers' (DES, 1985), to visit 'potential customers' (NEDC/MSC, 1984) and to maintain 'regular

consultation...through visits' (Audit Commission, 1985). The attractions are obvious. Employers ought to know market-place needs better than anyone. Even if that is not always so, employers remain the major training needs information source. All the secondary research material discussed above uses employer evidence. Why not go directly to the proverbial 'horse's mouth'?

The constraints are financial. Both respondents and interviewers incur costs. Employers have to give up their time: because information is valuable and can command a price, commercial researchers sometimes pay respondents. The interviewer has the additional tasks of preparation, travel, transcribing and analysing data. Without external funding, interviewing has to be used sparingly to estimate the volume of possible business after secondary research and agency confirmation have revealed possible unmet needs.

If the pursuit of training needs data cannot be resourced from existing finances,the LEA/college has potential recourse to *external funding*, of which the most important source has been Local Collaborative Projects. Up to October 1987 there were 475 large/small projects (347 completed, 128 ongoing). These have exhibited considerable variations in both duration (three to 39 months) and funding level (just under £5,000 to nearly £117,000). Such arrangements are ideal from a college perspective, since they put additional resources into the task of defining training needs. They also permit both providers and employers to join (hence the term *collaborative*) in the exercise.

Alas, funds are limited. Not only LEAs and colleges are defined as providers, but also private sector trainers, including universities.

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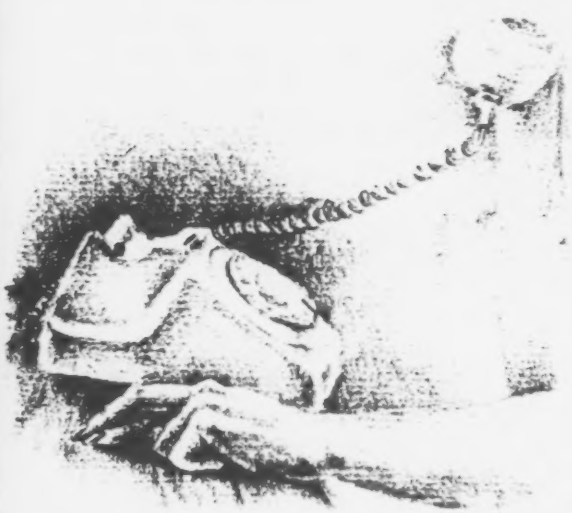
Fewer than a quarter of colleges have projects at any one time, and the projects themselves concern only a fraction of the training offered in most colleges.

Another example is the *industrial liaison unit*, funded by additional (LEA or external agency) resources. These units exist to establish and maintain college-employer contacts and offer opportunities for marketing research. So long as the money is forthcoming, the arrangement works well, but unit continuance cannot be taken for granted.

To avoid the costs identified above, some marketeers have taken to *inviting employers to the college* on a variety of pretexts, hoping to obtain marketing information as a spin-off. Success is doubtful. The College-Employer Links Project (DES, 1985) has now effectively challenged any suggestion that advisory committees can produce labour market intelligence. College committees exist to legitimise institutional activity - i.e. they serve political rather than enquiry ends - and are incapable of producing quantitative data because their members represent vast constituencies. For the same reasons, other kinds of gatherings - breakfast seminars, working lunches, open days - are unlikely to fare better as researcher tools, but they do offer opportunities for selling and the possibility of obtaining soft information.



If one cannot achieve face-to-face employer contact, a possible substitute is *telephone calls*, an approach favoured by private sector researchers. To be effective, the telephone call has to be carefully prepared and conducted. It may be necessary to prearrange a talk with an identified individual, when the caller may ask for 10 to 15 minutes at a time convenient to the respondent. Because they are relatively inexpensive, it is surprising that colleges have not made more use of telephone calls to conduct primary research.

Postal surveys have the attraction of low costs. Professional researchers, however, approach them with caution. Postal questionnaires usually generate low response rates, seldom above 30 per cent and frequently below 10 per cent. The result is a self-selecting sample among whom the selection principles remain invisible. One may improve response rates by providing stamped, addressed envelopes; by keeping questionnaires short; by having a second go with non-returners; or (in commercial agencies) by running a competition or a prize draw.

Colleges have also sought to establish *employer databases*. Because of costs involved in acquiring information from primary research, some colleges have hired commercial data to supplement that held in the institution. This reduces costs but does not remove them since data are leased for a limited period. The database also needs regular staff inputs on information collected from employers. There are practical and political difficulties in getting staff to cooperate, and many colleges are still attempting to overcome the problems.

What is apparent is that primary contextual research is expensive and difficult. The college dilemma is that (apart from an LEA marketing unit) no one else is going to provide the information it requires. Desk research can yield pointers and external agencies offer confirmation, but if the college does not know its own market-place from first-hand evidence, it is at a competitive disadvantage.

In private life, cars, houses and pensions are also expensive, and most of us manage one or all. Without the windfall of external funding, the college ought to invest in primary marketing research only when it is confident that the results will help to inform important decisions, but invest it must. Primary research is a major commitment which cannot be entered into lightly, but it is also the basis for survival.

Researching customers

Researching the market-place also involves customers.

Not all students are interested in meeting community needs. Not all employers rely exclusively on college services. Customers can be a capricious lot, strong willed and independent, sometimes

inscrutable and resistant to blandishments. A successful marketeer needs to know his/her customers very well.

Analysis of *current purchasing patterns* will reveal the defining characteristics of college users. It is useful to log: enquiries (number, source, pattern); applications (offers, acceptances, rejections); student attributes (curriculum area, attendance mode, age, gender, travel distance, previous experience/study, personal status, current employment, income, dependants, reasons for study, etc.); employer attributes (business, size, growth rate, etc.); and repeat business.

By *identifying market segments* using or likely to use the college and identifying which characteristics are most often linked with sales, the college can target advertising more accurately.

If customers are receiving ineffective messages, it may be useful to try *balancing price and value*: how do clients view the price, quality and value of particular courses? This information can be used to modify a course or the perceptions of it. For example, one can extend recruitment by lowering the price (i.e. reducing entry requirements) so as to increase the value resulting from purchase.

All the above information can define more clearly the essential characteristics of college users, but it is also helpful to know something about the entire population, both to locate non-user groups who might be persuaded to buy, and to identify population shifts which could affect the number of traditional users. Therefore the institution may undertake *demographic studies*.

Because colleges need to know something about what deters purchasers, another avenue of enquiry involves *exploring institutional images*. Misconceptions about the college may put off potential customers, so it helps to know how the community regards the college and to modify the image if possible. (See **Fifth Formers: What Do They Think of Colleges?**, p.60)

Preoccupation with non-users has been stimulated by declining traditional markets. In the United States, where much research has been done, college non-users are: aged 25 and over, female, interested in part-time education, representative of minority groups (ethnic, the disabled, heads of single-parent families) - familiar

Fifth Formers:

What Do They Think of Colleges?

Falling rolls are stimulating competition for school leavers. In some colleges a recruitment shortfall is threatening jobs.

The 16-19 market is where schools, further and higher, sixth-form and tertiary colleges battle for business. Professional protocol reduces the clash to whispered disapproval, but beneath the polite façade, feelings run high. Sometimes they surface.

In one Responsive College project, secondary headteachers succeeded for months in withholding pupil addresses, preventing the local education authority from circulating information about training opportunities across the county.

With feelings running so high, it is hardly surprising that three other projects chose to survey fifth form attitudes to colleges.

MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE

The Bedfordshire project questionnaired 160 fourth formers about to enter the fifth form to learn how they viewed local colleges. Only three per cent had ever visited a college, but the survey results were more positive than was anticipated.

More than four-fifths said they would consider applying for a college course. More than half saw colleges as providing courses with vocational qualifications which gave the holder an employment advantage.

There were surprises. Three-quarters knew colleges offered O and A Levels, but there was almost total ignorance about college involvement in the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. The report draws attention to pupil reliance on - and the need for better contacts with - schools careers teachers. It also points to a need for improving college careers presentations: less biased information, simpler language, more facts about unfamiliar training areas.

GETTING TO PARENTS

The Suffolk project started with the knowledge that its county had 'the lowest 1984 college staying-on rate of all shire counties'. It conducted 'extensive open-ended discussions' with small groups drawn from 71 first-year students at four county colleges. Later it questionnaired 249 pupils in six local authority schools chosen to include the principal town, a smaller town and a rural location, and both 11-16 and 11-18 provision.

From a list of 25 statements which respondents were asked to rank, it was possible to draw a picture of student attitudes. Respondents were fairly certain about job aspirations and inclined to view education and qualifications as more important than earning money as soon as possible. Colleges were viewed as accessible and as not too off-putting, but also as not providing as much student support as schools.

Sixth forms were regarded as different from the lower school in the way students were treated, and A Levels were seen as a practical and a suitable route to employment and higher education. The Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education was suitable for all students, and the

Youth Training Scheme was a positive option and not just a last chance for the unemployed.

The report notes an A Level 'hegemony' and over-optimism on the part of respondents. It recommends that vocational course materials should not ignore the college's role as a positive second choice for A Level students, who should be encouraged to apply to colleges as well as to sixth forms.

Marketing lessons are made explicit. Publicity should start from the position of 'where students want to be' - motor vehicle mechanic, secretary, graphic designer - and show how they can achieve their goals through specific courses. Given the importance of parents in pupil decision-making, colleges should try to reach parents through press or local radio and encourage them to explore opportunities for sons and daughters.

PRIVATE AND GROUP VISITS

The Gwynedd project adopted a different approach by surveying the entire fifth year at one local authority school and requesting headteachers at the remaining 22 (16 responded) to nominate and survey a 'typical' fifth form class.

Female pupils were more satisfied with their knowledge of further education than were males. Both sexes relied on careers teachers for information, but the second major source was college open days for females and the county careers service for males.

Males and females visited colleges equally, but males tended to arrive in school groups while females organised their own visits. Impressions formed during informal visits with parents were worse than those gained during organised school visits, which led to a recommendation that colleges should encourage female pupils to visit more regularly with classmates.

The survey showed distance from school to college as influencing the number of fifth formers entering FE, but it was not possible to determine whether this resulted from less school-college staff contact or the disincentive of lengthy travel among pupils. The report ranks schools in terms of positive perceptions of colleges and points out which colleges need to improve the quality of their contacts with particular schools.

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMERS

Collecting and analysing data about market segments should help the provider target publicity materials and personal contacts more accurately.

Surveying fifth-former attitudes is relatively easy and inexpensive for a college. The information is almost always useful. Not only is it possible to identify areas where more marketing resources are required, but also those where current expenditure might be reduced without disadvantage.

The more fully a college knows and understands its clients the better its chances of meeting their needs and attracting their custom. But it would be a mistake to think only in terms of knowledge about others. Equally important is self-knowledge and an awareness of how the college impacts on clients. Many of the recommendations from the above surveys have implications for college organisation which go beyond the marketing unit.

Sources: Bedfordshire Responsive College Project, Dunkin, Pardey.

enough attributes among British college non-users. Traditional provision does not fit such people. What needs to be different?

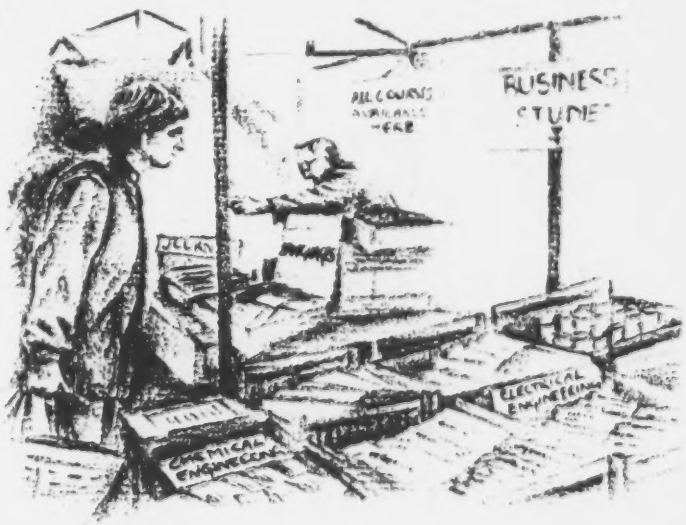
Some groups (ethnic minorities) may lack the confidence to work in colleges. For others there can be difficulties with teaching times, access to sites, car parking, children. Colleges therefore spend money finding out what people think, feel and want: are they affronted by sexist attitudes among staff? If they *consider themselves* disabled, do they believe the college can support them effectively? Are fees (and the ways of paying them) an obstacle?

British colleges have so far been less troubled by falling rolls, except in particular colleges and curriculum areas, but as recruitment problems hit new areas, those colleges which do not respond in new ways to new markets will be confronted - like colleges of education and schools - with rationalisation, reorganisation, merger, devices commonly used to mask closure.

It is worth noting that researching current customers is an area in which the college has considerable advantages. There is published material about the local population. Students come into college regularly and can be questionnaired easily and cheaply. Data are thus available largely for the taking and with only limited additional resources. The situation is less convenient with non-users and employers, to whom access is more difficult and expensive.

Researching competitors

The coincidence of the market-place need and available customers will not ensure a sale. There are competitors.



What a marketeer needs to know are the key characteristics of competing providers. Useful information about such competitors would include, for each course: number of sales; market share; comparative similarity and distinction among providers, with

reference to price, delivery times/venues/delays; the existence of clear dominance patterns within and across groups of competing providers; the stability and volatility of such patterns; and the possibility of shifting the competitive position.

This represents the kind of marketing research in which colleges have least experience. Perhaps a sense of professional propriety accounts for the paucity of research into college competitors. Much market-place research assumes that employer needs, once identified, will be met by the college. Not necessarily. Buyers can make their purchases at any market stall.

Competition is a rarely acknowledged feature of college life, even though the reward structure, institutional resourcing formulae, and job appointments all foster a highly competitive environment. Publicly, the LEA runs a 'system' in which schools and colleges dovetail without any overlapping (and hence competition).

In reality, where survival depends on finding more customers, the easiest solution is to poach from others. Colleges attempt to lure fifth formers into courses offered by schools. At the same time schools are entering traditional college territory. While schools move up-market to compensate for falling rolls, polytechnics and higher education colleges move down-market as their up-market business is poached by universities.

There are also private sector providers, and they possess distinct advantages. There is a kinship with employers. In small agencies, the profit motive encourages speedy response and a willingness to provide for small groups. The afflictions of large bureaucracies which beset colleges - problems with status, hierarchy, territorialism and gatekeeping - are less evident. By contrast colleges can exhibit contempt for those 'in business' and a tendency to advance education over training and to champion social rather than customer causes.

In the business world, competitors track one another's pricing and provision, filching good ideas when they occur, undercutting if

necessary, beating and besting. Industrial espionage is itself a business. Colleges, having for long enjoyed a protected position, are hesitant about taking competitors seriously. Failing to do so is however a serious mistake.

Paradoxically, competitor research is a relatively easy and undemanding area of college marketing activity. LEAs (should) have statistical information about the market share among their own schools and colleges, so some desk research is possible for the college marketeer. The extent to which this is readily available varies since the material may contain politically sensitive data about over-provision. In addition, all training agencies advertise. Just as one can find out a great deal about colleges from prospectuses and leaflets, so private trainers survive by revealing much more about their operations than is often appreciated. Identifying competitor advantages is not a difficult task. Matching them can be.

An overview of college marketing research

It is not market but *marketing* research that matters for the college, and it is valuable only insofar as it reveals where contraction, expansion or addition is appropriate.

AREA	SECONDARY RESEARCH	PRIMARY RESEARCH
CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH	Large body of printed material, suggests trends, movements. General, often lacking detail.	Possible (visits, phone calls, postal surveys) for college, LEA, external agency: the more reliable the more expensive.
CUSTOMER RESEARCH	Some research data available but not necessarily drawn from immediate college area. LEA records unlikely to offer much of marketing value.	LEA has limited interest. College has opportunity to gather useful data at low cost about students. Data about non-users likely to involve costs similar to primary contextual research.
COMPETITOR RESEARCH	LEA holds useful data about other LEA competitors.	Officially little done but potentially fruitful area of exploration.

Figure 4. Matrix of present marketing research opportunities as viewed from within the college.

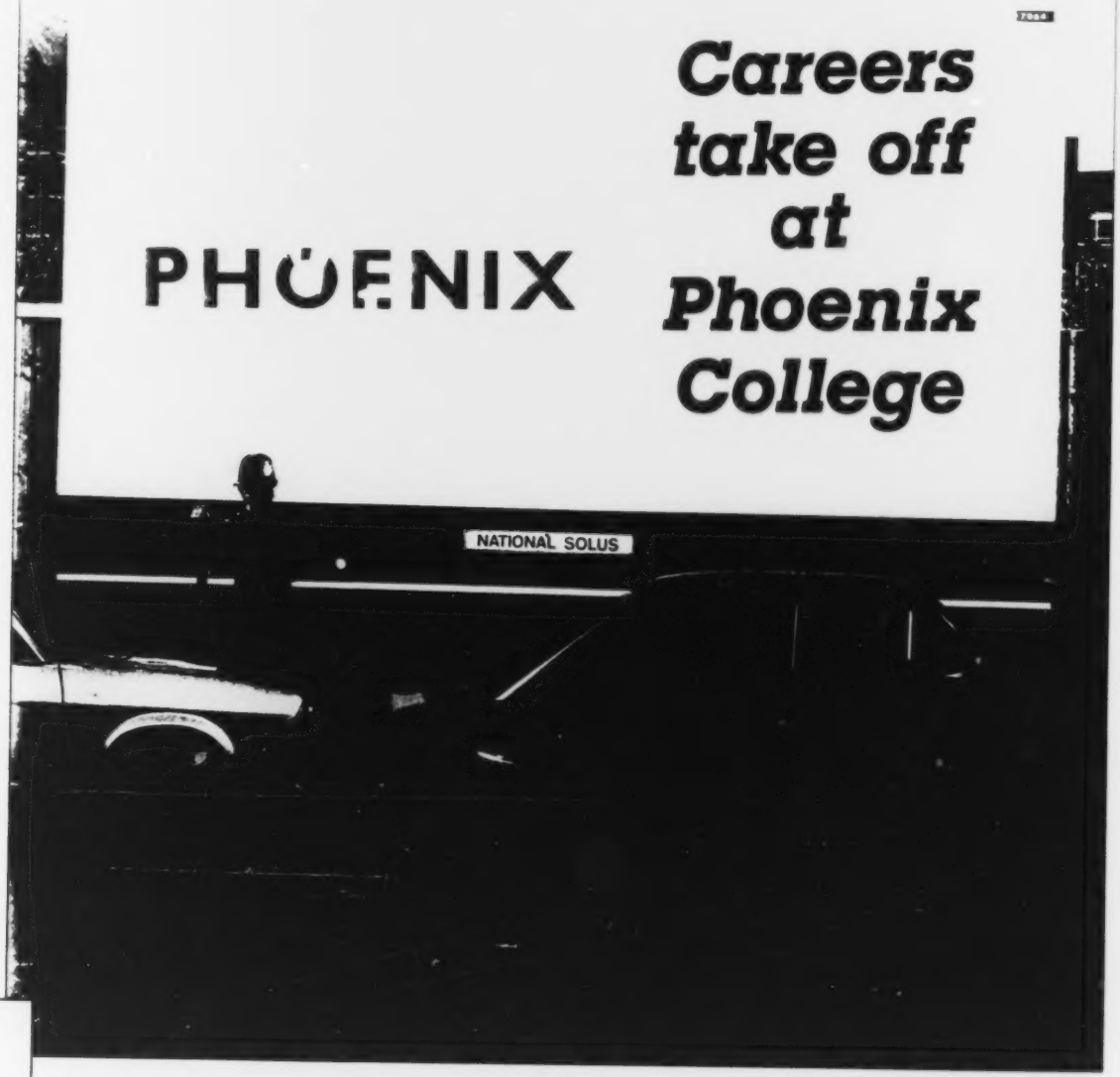
For many colleges, survival is becoming uncertain and depends to some extent on marketing research. In practical terms that means: identifying areas (within the context) where resource investment or redeployment would be profitable; influencing customer behaviour in order to stimulate recruitment; and overcoming and outwitting the competition. We can draw together the activities in the form of a matrix (Figure 4) where the left axis represents the three areas of enquiry and the top the kinds of research.

The market-place is a vast complexity with an almost unlimited number of variables. The researcher's task is like trying to decide where to invest money: in a building society, in property, in the stock market? As the crash of '87 reminded us, risk is unavoidable. Even so, unless one is clairvoyant, psychic or uncommonly lucky, it is better to base a marketing decision on the best evidence one can obtain rather than on no evidence or on gossip.

Chapter 3

Product Development, Promotion and Selling

The last thing we do is advertise. A lot of people think marketing equals advertising. Not so. Before we even think about advertising or publicity, we make sure we've got our product right, our target market right – and even then we only advertise when we're certain the people we want to address are *accessible* by advertising (an awful lot of people aren't). Having decided to advertise, we don't do it by halves.



We use a wide range of approaches for conveying information about our services.

oduct Development, omotion and Selling

Having learnt what customers want, a client-centred college faces a double task: producing courses which meet identified needs, and informing prospective buyers. In teacher jargon we have arrived at curriculum development and course recruitment, areas in which colleges are highly experienced and where marketing may appear to have little to offer.

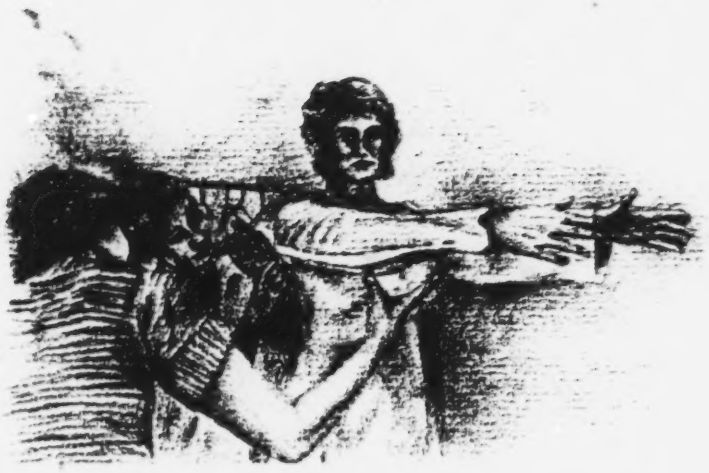
The products in the product cycle

In an article subtitled 'Products or People?', Robinson and Long (1987) argue for a different college marketing model. They suggest that the traditional model has been developed

> ...*from observations of* manufacturers of products *supplying a* mass-consumer *market. Clearly, colleges of further education are providers of a* service *to a* community market . . .

Alas, teachers may claim that colleges are concerned with people rather than products - offering a service and not a stall - but the reality is different. A glance at the prospectus will confirm that college business involves matching people to courses. There are entry requirements and interview hurdles. When demand exceeds supply, the 'best' customers have to be selected.

In England and Wales, most course content is identified before the student arrives and cannot easily be modified. Modular courses, including the Scottish variety, offer a quasi-customised alternative: component assembly allows some choice, albeit within established rules. Other ways of permitting some customisation are via non-standard entry, generally restricted to 'mature' students; and credit transfer, where the learner is exempted from parts of the present course because of work done on a previous one. Neither approach is common.



Totally customised provision which *starts* from learner needs is rare, but there are exceptions. The negotiated curriculum is one. Others are research degrees and projects which form part of diploma and first-degree courses. There are also one-off short courses designed for employers. Yet if one were to place all college work on a balancing scale, with student-controlled learning on one side and teacher-directed work on the other, the latter would weigh substantially more.

No educational reasons exist for restricting customisation. If courses were built around individual learners, the product cycle would be redundant. One could advertise the service rather than the course. The negotiation process would be marketing research. In long courses, all content could not be identified at the start, so intermittent negotiation would represent quality control. After-sales surveys would be inappropriate, because customers would have got what they wanted.

There are valid reasons why this approach is seldom used. Since no two students have absolutely identical needs, negotiated learning has to be conducted with individuals, which is costly. The learner may find negotiation time-consuming if he or she lacks knowledge (e.g. *ab initio* study). Standardised, certificated learning means that employers need not devise systems for evaluating job applicants' skills. Present arrangements suit many people.

But there are customers...and customers. British purchasers are notoriously compliant and tolerant, or at least individuals are. Business and industry react differently, and this is reflected in college attitudes.

Thus one can find a college (anonymous) advertising courses to students in terms of fixed structure, content, teaching sites, topics, entry requirements and assessment arrangements, while adopting a different approach for industry:

> *We consider it part of our function to respond to the education and training needs of industry and commerce, not only by*

providing a package off the shelf, but by jointly producing a specific response.

The last two years have seen an increase in the number of private courses specially designed for individual companies, local, national and overseas - from two-day seminars to 12-week full-time courses. Any company contemplating further training is advised to arrange a fact-finding meeting with faculty staff. The training will be costed and schemes of work prepared to meet requirements. The faculty can offer a full package deal for most courses to include accommodation, training programme, industrial visits and educational literature.

What the above demonstrates is that when the stakes are high enough, flexibility and customisation emerge.

The course as product: the customer's view

Many teachers view courses in terms of entry requirements, behavioural objectives, structure, content, assignments, examination arrangements. They describe courses similarly. This is the learning-teaching interaction as seen from the front of the classroom. It concentrates on those parts of the exchange which the teacher controls and directs, rather than on how the experience feels to the learner.

To a student a course is a means of achieving personal goals. It is a time and a place. It is also a college and its services - buildings and rooms, cleaning standards, counselling, library, canteen, leisure facilities, clubs, societies; plus staff (academic and support) and other learners. Content is experienced not as a syllabus but through teaching, classroom organisation and materials.

Off-the-peg course purchasing is risky because customers seldom know (or are told) what they are buying. With longer courses, unexpected changes in staffing and the workplace can mean that what was intended is no longer available or appropriate.

To an employer a course is more than syllabus content. It is also how he/she is received by telephonists and receptionists, a willingness to customise offerings, the closeness of teaching staff to the

current market-place and what happens to employees as a consequence of attending a college course.

A responsive college knows about client aspirations and sensitivities, how customers view current delivery as it occurs and how they retrospectively regard their purchases. Such a college is concerned with product development, but it sees it in terms wider than the syllabus. That may figure in course changes designed to meet customer needs, but so, too, may the time and place; client reception; college services; buildings, classrooms, equipment and facilities.

Promotion and selling: the need for proof

The identification of marketing with promotion and selling (to the exclusion of other aspects) has encouraged colleges to devote considerable attention to improving publicity efforts. Prospectuses have been redesigned, leaflets produced, course directories devised, advertisements run. More and more stalls are being set up in local markets, information being given out over local radio/TV, and videos being produced for local secondary school recruiting.

Unfortunately there is an absence of hard evidence to confirm that this activity brings in more - or even a significant part of the - business. Most students seem to arrive in spite of anything the college does or does not do.

Responsive College surveys involving more than 9,500 students show that those who acknowledged advertising as their information source for the college and the course represented just over four per cent of the total. Something like 90 per cent of customers learnt about the college either through their own efforts or those of intermediaries who are not employed by the college. (See **College Advertising: Is There Anybody Out There?**, p. 75)

A persistent difficulty in measuring the effectiveness of advertising is the lack of follow-up activity, i.e. few attempts are made to learn where enquirers first heard of the course or college, and hence the number of enquiries and course places generated per advertisement. The results of promotional events such as open days or market stalls appear to reveal a similar absence of clear evidence. They also tend to be 'hyped' retrospectively by their organisers, with

FEATURE

College Advertising: Is There Anybody Out There?

With traditional markets in decline and growing competition for remaining shares, colleges ought to advertise more aggressively. Or so commercial experience suggests. Advertising enables the vendor to penetrate existing markets more deeply and to enter new markets. The college situation is less encouraging.

INVISIBLE BROKERS

In a Responsive College study of 2,500 students (from Cleveland, Doncaster, Gwynedd, Lancashire, Newham, Sheffield, Strathclyde) only four per cent had learnt about their courses from 'a newspaper or other advertisement'. In contrast, a third had gained their information from an employer, a fifth from phoning or visiting the college, a quarter from a friend or member of the family, and an eighth each from a careers officer or from a 'careers teacher or other teacher'. Libraries provided assistance to one per cent and other sources to five per cent.

The implications are that nine out of ten students reach their courses either through intermediaries or their own efforts. Advertising seems to bring in few customers.

In some instances, the proportional few can be numerically many. Newham with 15,000 students might consider 600 (only four per cent) a significant group of customers. Across cities like Sheffield (six tertiary colleges) or Birmingham (nine), even a small proportion can add up to an impressive total.

SLIGHT VARIATIONS

Elsewhere, the results show differences, but within a limited range. A Lincolnshire survey of 945 students revealed that only two per cent had learnt of their courses from advertisements. A 1988 follow-up involving 2,853 students showed the proportion arriving via advertising reduced to one per cent.

Conversely, a second programme survey of 806 students revealed a more impressive proportion (9.5 per cent) who identified advertising as their information source. Within the group there were variations, from just over one per cent at Blackburn College (Lancashire) to just under 10 per cent at Newham. The latter had recently invested considerable effort in improved advertising.

Moreover, our surveys must include students whose courses have not been advertised. Therefore, having come up with only two per cent of 280 students who had arrived through advertising, the Strathclyde project repeated the exercise with 648 students attending courses known to have been advertised: the figure moved to five per cent, an improvement, but hardly impressive.

Some surveys have produced more encouraging results. In a publicity workshop held with 89 students in Weston-super-Mare Technical College, a tenth claimed to have learnt about their courses from advertisements, but exactly equal proportions did so from the job centre and the library, and still larger groups via their own initiative or intermediaries.

An enrolment survey of 94 students at Barnfield College indicated that nearly 15 per cent had gathered information about their courses from newspapers. Half had relied on their own efforts and a third on those of others.

OLDER STUDENTS

Where additional work has been done on these samples to reveal correlations between variables, there is some evidence that older students are more likely to learn of college courses through newspapers. For example, in the sample of 2,500, there was an increase in use of newspaper sources with advancing years.

There are similar results in the Weston sample. In the Barnfield survey noted above, all who learnt of courses from newspapers were aged over 19, but no further age breakdown was undertaken.

A Salford study of attenders at an open learning day hints at a similar link between age and responses to advertisements. Precise details of age were not collected, but if one assumes that those characterised as housewives, retired, self-employed, or college leavers were all over 19, a staggering two-thirds of the 86 respondents learnt of the open day through the newspaper.

ENROLMENT SURVEYS

Colleges use advertisements for a variety of purposes, including announcing (or reminding prospective students of) enrolment days. Four other (in addition to Barnfield noted above) project studies of enrolment arrangements suggest variable customer reliance on newspaper advertisements for such information.

The results are erratic. At Blackpool and the Fylde College over a third of the 82 interviewed obtained attendance details from newspapers; at Dunstable College 14 per cent of 582; at Luton College six per cent of 299; but at Worsley College only two per cent of 357.

If one combines the results of these five (including Barnfield) studies (a total of 1,414), advertising accounts for 11 per cent as a source of information. There is also the possibility that many (most?) were already committed to enrolling when the advertisements appeared.

MORE WORK TO BE DONE

One school of thought (prevalent among professional agencies) argues that advertising impacts subliminally. Consciously we forget the advertisement but are actually driven by its message.

Other hypotheses suggest that advertisements lead to telephone calls or prospectuses, which then appear to be the point of contact, or that intermediaries (parents, careers teachers and officers, employers, friends) convey the advertising message to applicants. All these possibilities are impossible to prove.

Drawing firm conclusions is hardly advisable from our limited database. All our studies relied upon random and opportunity samples amounting to around 9,500 students from a total population of several million. More work needs to be done.

It also needs to be conducted on an institutional rather than a global basis, since the resulting data are of use only to individual colleges, and the above indicates potential variations. It would help to log information sources from enquirers: where did you hear about us? It would also be useful to identify the characteristics of those who read advertisements: age, gender, study interests, etc.

WAITING FOR PROOF

Responsive College work suggests that there is as yet no evidence to assume that large proportions of college students are reached by advertising. Those who are seem to come from older age groups.

There is also insufficient evidence about how much colleges advertise, or the sums of money involved, although a trawl of local newspapers in the projects produced scores of examples from the

late summer and early autumn period in 1987.

The picture to date is of a system which recruits students in spite of anything it may (or may not) have done. Those who see advertising as the answer to a college's prayers ought to accept the burden of proof.

Sources: Blundell, Estcourt/Hill (1987 a and b), Hooper/Walker, Howie/Traynor (1988), King, Lancashire Responsive College Project, Short, Theodossin/ Thomson,

attendance or enquiry numbers taken, but without follow-up to record eventual purchases. When open days fail - and they do so more than is publicly acknowledged - the bad news is discreetly buried.

The danger with promotional and advertising activity is that colleges may be inspired to increase the volume and improve the quality without tracking the quantitative effects. If resources are limited, broadcasting to the wind is an unnecessary luxury.

Artefacts as college messengers

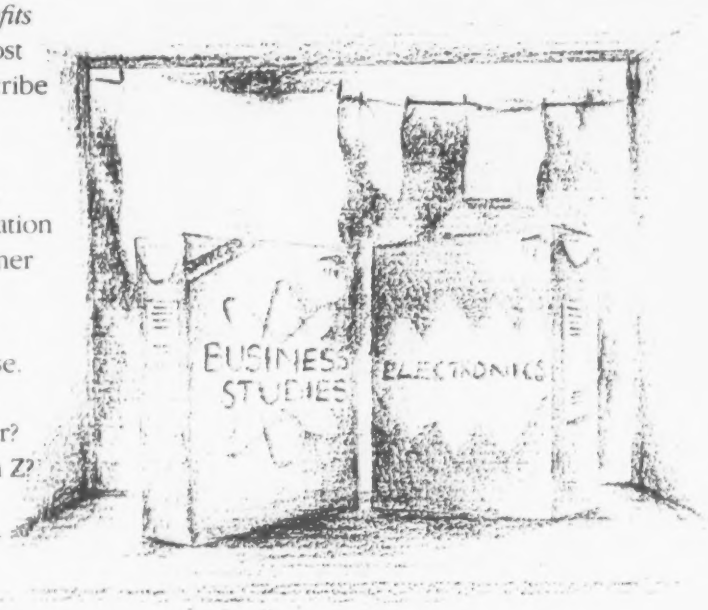
Colleges spend the bulk of their advertising budgets on prospectuses and leaflets. More ambitious institutions branch out into college bookmarks, car labels, shopping bags, pens, beer mats, scarves, and (one specimen noted thus far) yo-yos. Others invest in college videos and a variety of booklets, radio/TV advertisements and other items. The aim is to bring in customers: the artefacts serve promotional and advertising ends.

The basic requirement involves using the right media to get the right message to the most receptive markets. As with all marketing activity, the trick is to view the proposed approach from the client's perspective, or (better still) to ask the customer.

Promotional material should *focus on the client rather than the provider*. One still finds college prospectuses whose opening pages are devoted to governing body and staff: qualifications, salary grades, titles, photographs of the most important and a 'personal' message from the principal. Such an approach depicts the college world as seen by those occupying prominent positions, rather than as experienced by prospective customers, i.e. it is a ritual display document rather than a communication device.

Equally inappropriate are photographic clichés: student on trampoline, modern dance group, student at computer, student in laboratory, student strumming guitar in immaculate study bedroom, etc. The best way to present students is not as anonymous stereotypes, but as named individuals with biographical details. Why did they come? What are they getting out of their courses? What do they hope to do? Where are last year's leavers? All of which means far more to a customer than the nuances of academic staff status.

Advertising should *make clear to the customer the benefits obtainable* from purchase. Most prospectuses and leaflets describe rather than analyse, and they describe courses as seen by teachers: entry requirements, content, organisation, examination arrangements, etc. The customer is interested in knowing how he/she will be better off as a result of completing the course. If soap powder X gives you a whiter wash, what does Y offer? And why choose Y rather than Z?



Since all customers will not be attracted by the same benefits, material needs to be *targeted at a specific market segment*. The traditional prospectus has had to serve a great variety of users. Diverse student groups are an obvious problem: the charms of being able to smoke without constraint may lure the fifth former, and repulse the 35-plus market. Employers, personnel officers, careers teachers/officers have to use the same material. Some colleges have opted for several prospectuses (e.g. full-time and part-time), but however sliced or reorganised, the conventional approach has the double drawback of having to communicate with incompatible users and of being costly.

One solution is a college folder providing a general overview but supplemented by course 'sheets', each giving details about one course. An alternative is course leaflets, which have emerged in great

variety. They offer maximum opportunities for targeting. Size, content, approach and even costs can vary from course to course, as appropriate. A complementary approach involves a course directory: computer-based, regularly updated, inexpensively printed with a plain cover, intended for professional 'brokers' - personnel officers, librarians, careers officers.

Copy should be *written in customer language*. The uninitiated will not understand *a top-down structured approach, phase tests, oral communication, induction, functional aspects*, etc. Teacher jargon means something only to other teachers.

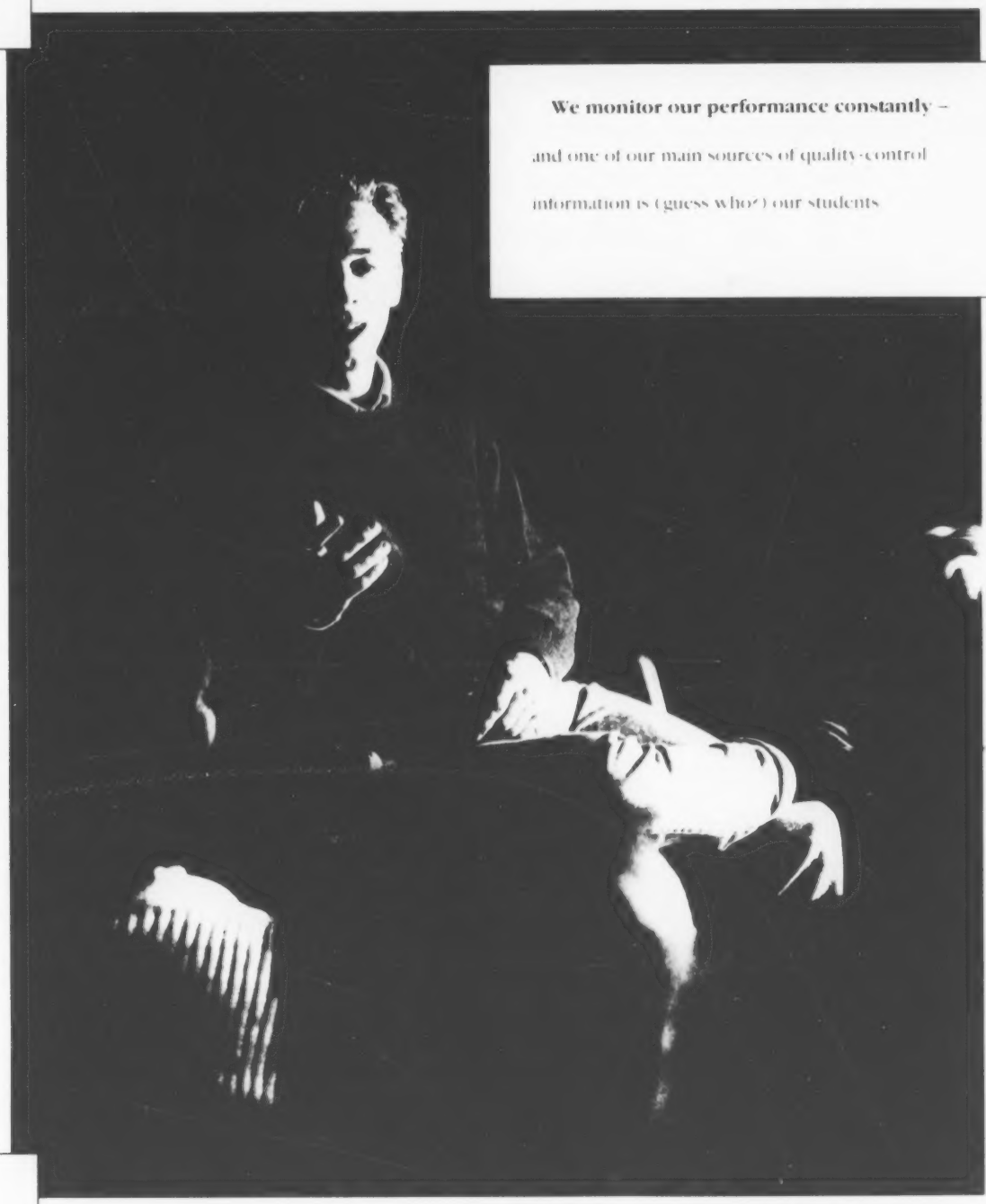
The customer should *know where and how to obtain the product*. Private-sector providers often give named individuals to contact. Teachers do not make good contacts because they are frequently unavailable, while teaching. Office staff, permanently by desk and telephone, offer a much better prospect to the client.

Publicity material with the above characteristics will not often win colleague approval. What appeals to teachers does not necessarily impress customers, but the goal is to bring in business - not teachers.

It would be a mistake to suggest that all college promotion and advertising need is more sophisticated techniques. No less important is the development of an across-the-college approach: a common policy and a willingness to examine the consequences of investment. At departmental or cost-centre level, there may well be valuable information (positive and negative, what to do and not do) gleaned over the years but neither seen nor shared by those who might benefit. In order for promotion and advertising to play a more effective role in marketing, colleges need to enter a period of *rigorous tracking of promotional and advertising expenditure per enrolment place and of sharing the resulting information with all those who need it*.

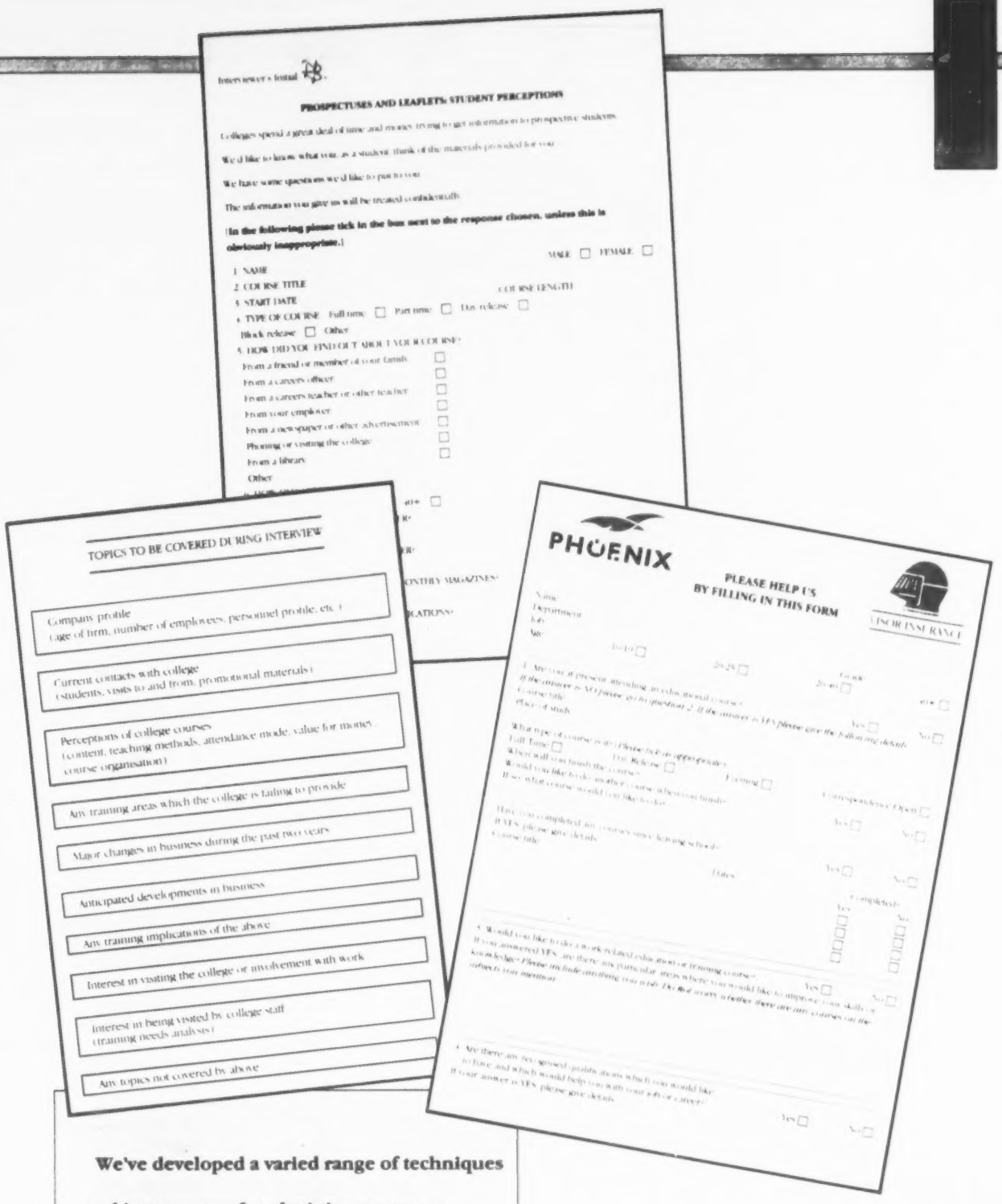
Chapter 4

Quality Control and After-Sales Service



We monitor our performance constantly –

and one of our main sources of quality-control information is (guess who?) our students.


Interviewer's Initial
PROSPECTUSES AND LEAFLETS: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS
Colleges spend a great deal of time and money trying to get information to prospective students.
We'd like to know what you, as a student, think of the materials provided for you.
We have some questions we'd like to put to you.
The information you give us will be treated confidentially.
[In the following please tick in the box next to the response chosen, unless this is obviously inappropriate.]
MALE
FEMALE
1. NAME
2. COURSE TITLE
COURSE LENGTH
3. START DATE
4. TYPE OF COURSE: Full time
Part time
Day release
Block release
Other
5. HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR COURSE?
From a friend or member of your family
From a careers officer
From a careers teacher or other teacher
From your employer
From a newspaper or other advertisement
Phoning or visiting the college
From a library
Other
TOPICS TO BE COVERED DURING INTERVIEW
Company profile
(age of firm, number of employees, personnel profile, etc.)
Current contacts with college
(students, visits to and from, promotional materials)
Perceptions of college courses
(content, teaching methods, attendance mode, value for money, course organisation)
Any training areas which the college is failing to provide
Major changes in business during the past two years
Anticipated developments in business
Any training implications of the above
Interest in visiting the college or involvement with work
Interest in being visited by college staff
(training needs analysis)
Any topics not covered by above
PHOENIX
PLEASE HELP US
BY FILLING IN THIS FORM
INSURANCE

We've developed a varied range of techniques and instruments for obtaining customer perceptions. If we find anything amiss, we take immediate action to put it right.

uality Control and
ter-Sales Service

From a marketing perspective, education and training are services, even though colleges market *products* to most customers.

In manufacturing industry, quality control systems are designed to ensure that each article possesses properties consistent throughout the series, e.g. that the specifications of Metro 12,487 are as nearly identical as possible to those of Metro 6,435. In a service industry, what matters is whether customers get what they want and are satisfied with what they receive.

In catering or tourism there are no absolute standards, only degrees of client satisfaction. What pleases one may offend another: the college must accept some level of disapprobation. No one can satisfy all customers all of the time, or immediately put right all wrongs. Moreover, purchasers continue to live with their experiences, for which reason an after-sales service is an extension of quality control, a continuing concern with the consequences of what was provided.

The measurement of customer satisfaction

In seeking customer views, one needs to distinguish between two kinds of information and between two ways of collecting it. One may request information which is *confidential* because its source cannot be identified, or *public* because the origins are visible. One may take a *direct* approach to customers by talking with them, or an *indirect* one by relying upon questionnaires or observed behaviour.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Figure 5 sets out the options for quality control. A direct confidential approach requires interviewing, usually by someone not teaching on the course. An example of a direct public approach is the course committee on which providers, students and employers are represented.

Questionnaires can be used to solicit indirect confidential data if they are anonymous, or the indirect public kind if respondents reveal their identity. Other examples of the latter approach involve the collection of statistics about enrolment, retention and absence rates.

Options for after-sales service are presented in Figure 6. Interviews again provide direct confidential data. A direct public approach is the use of de-briefing course discussions (run by teachers or managers) after formal meetings have ended.

As with quality control, in after-sales work questionnaires can be used as an indirect approach to both confidential and public data. There are other indirect/public approaches involving examination pass rates, post-course destinations, and repeat business rates.

Experience suggests that some approaches offer more practical advantages than others. Course committees exhibit the same drawbacks as the advisory kind: they employ representation, which limits the number of customers who can participate, and their purpose is legitimisation, i.e. they serve provider interests.

The de-briefing discussion, which some teachers use, has obvious limitations: it precludes confidentiality and, as in all group debate, allows more assertive members to stress their views and influence others. The presence of teachers (and their superiors) can be inhibiting. Both approaches make it difficult to determine the extent to which any view is held.

One-to-one interviews are ideal for collecting customer data because they allow respondents the fullest control over their evidence. Unfortunately - as noted under marketing research - they are

APPROACH	CONFIDENTIAL	PUBLIC
DIRECT	Interviews	Course Committee
INDIRECT	Questionnaires	Questionnaires Enrolments Retention/Absence Rates

Figure 5. Matrix of quality control customer data.

APPROACH	CONFIDENTIAL	PUBLIC
DIRECT	Interviews	Post-Mortem Discussion
INDIRECT	Questionnaires	Questionnaires Examination Pass Rates Post-Course Destinations Repeat-Business Rates

Figure 6. Matrix of after-sales customer data.

expensive. Interviewing students may not involve travel, but staff time costs money. Professional protocol makes it unlikely that support staff can be used for student interviews to achieve savings. It is consequently advisable to exclude interviews from both quality control and after-sales data collection, at least in first-stage work where quantitative data are sought. Interviewing is nevertheless appropriate in follow-up investigations, particularly with employers.

This means rejecting all direct approaches, either because they limit the amount of evidence which can be collected, make it difficult to determine the extent to which views are held, and/or are too expensive. That leaves us with indirect approaches and concentration on six enquiry areas: *enrolment, retention/absence rates, client satisfaction, examination pass rates, student progression* and *repeat business*.

Collecting data indirectly means that one is distancing oneself from the actual sources of information. Customers views have to be filtered through intervening devices such as questionnaires or behavioural statistics. The result is *performance indicators*.

From a marketing perspective, the *performance* in a performance indicator refers to the behaviour of a customer, e.g. whether he completed a course, which boxes he ticked on the questionnaire, how she did in her examination, whether he got a job, whether she purchased again.

What that performance *indicates* could be a possible source of satisfaction or concern: whether it is can be determined only through investigation. A large proportion of a class not completing a course may result from wrong information given during enrolment or from poor teaching, but it may also follow job offers from an employer moving into the area. What is indicated by the customer's performance is not self-evident.

Performance indicators use customer behaviour as a proxy for the customer, but, like all agents, the proxy is not the same as the real thing. The resulting uncertainty means that performance indicators have to be used with caution. They impose constraints.

The information collected is usually crude. Questionnaires restrict responses, and any one response (good or bad) can mean

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different things to different people. There may be opportunities to add comments, but space is limited and the resulting data difficult to quantify. None of this is unexpected, since many questionnaires assist quantification by forcing respondents to fit into defined patterns.

What is recorded by performance indicators (enrolment, retention, job placement) *is not necessarily explicable in terms of what did or did not happen in the college.*

Since the resulting information will be both crude and in need of amplification, performance indicators are *best employed in multiple rather than single modes*. They are used to most advantage to *quantify customer behaviour among large groups*. One is looking for deviation from the norm, i.e. extreme behaviour. The larger the sample, the more convincingly the norm can be identified and the more sharply the deviation can emerge.

Because human behaviour is complex, understanding requires that more than one action be considered. Therefore one should *use groups of performance indicators*. High enrolment rates can be followed by high non-completion and low pass rates. Several indicators suggesting a similar explanation are more likely to justify the attention of a busy manager.

The use of multiple modes (many customers, several indicators) encourages aggregation at higher and higher levels, e.g. across the college and authority. This makes interpretation difficult. If the intention is to identify sharp deviations from the norm, one needs to know where (widely or in specific courses) those deviations occur. It is possible to have an over-all retention rate of 85 per cent which is identical for seven departments, or the same global rate which is higher in six departments and much lower in the seventh: the latter distinction will not surface if the data are aggregated at college level. *Interpretation necessitates disaggregation of statistical data into managerial areas: course, section, department, college.*

It is apparent from the above that performance indicators do not tell us what is wrong but merely *suggest where something may be wrong, i.e. they function as a scanning or monitoring device*. Performance indicators offer a first line of enquiry. In deciding whether there are difficulties to be confronted, the manager needs to investigate

further. At this point, one may use a direct/confidential approach by interviewing employers to gauge the market-place demand for a particular course, or learn why the college's qualified students fare so badly in job competition.

The marketeer's task is to develop a scanning system which enables possible trouble spots to be identified. *It is not his/her task to act upon information revealed, but to pass it to college management*. If there are high levels of student and employer dissatisfaction with the computing certificate course, and retention and pass rates are low, the possible problems and solutions are the responsibility of course tutor, section head, head of department, principal.

As noted above, both college and course experiences are important to the customer, so *the performance indicators used need to concentrate on more than classroom interaction*. The resulting information will not be of equal interest to every manager. Those performing at different organisational levels will require different information.

In essence marketeers are messengers. Their role is a servicing one. Their first loyalty is to the customer. Their goal is to promote the highest levels of customer satisfaction attainable.

Caveats and cautions...

Anyone running a marketing quality control management information system should recognise what the collected data do and do not represent. *Client satisfaction surveying cannot be construed as a quality assurance system*.

Client satisfaction can reveal to what extent the customer values a purchase, but it does not indicate market-place value. The fact that students derived personal gratification from completing course X does not make the students marketable. For that, certification is required.

In Britain a vast network of agencies exists to provide formal recognition of learning: universities, validating bodies, examining boards, professional examining bodies and industry training organisations. Collectively these agencies number more than 400, but

the totality is so vast and complex that no one appears to know the exact figure.

In recent years efforts have been made to bring this vastness into streamlined order. The Scots have probably been most effective because their centralist tradition has enabled them to introduce a unified modular scheme (how far it will extend is not yet clear). In England and Wales there have been sequential attempts at rationalisation, the latest being the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, but even this is unlikely to be the end of the story.

The awards themselves are perceived as having different values in different markets. In obtaining some jobs a degree of any kind may be a disadvantage. When a degree is sought, buyers will bring different prejudices to bear in evaluating university and polytechnic degrees, and in assessing the usefulness of a particular course.

In the market-place it is the interplay between the quality assurance system (some agencies are more prestigious than others) and the judgements of buyers which determines how quality is viewed. Customer satisfaction has little to do with the process and is primarily a college marketing concern.

So, too, with classroom activity. *Client satisfaction surveying cannot be considered teacher appraisal.* To be sure, no attempt to evaluate teacher effectiveness can altogether ignore customers, but teacher appraisal also requires the evidence of professionals - managers, peers and teachers themselves. Customer evidence is part of what is required for staff appraisal, but neither the whole nor necessarily the most important part. Customers are certainly aware of the extremes of unacceptable teacher behaviour (e.g. drunkenness, lateness), but most lack the breadth of experience necessary to make informed judgements about lesson structure, content and presentation, and few have an adequate understanding of how to make an unsatisfactory lesson more effective.

Over all, student perceptions of teaching are positive. A persistent minority voices dissatisfaction, often with specific classes or courses, but they seldom amount to more than 10 per cent from a sample of several hundred. If one were constructing a hierarchy of perceived teacher effectiveness, students would appear as the most

positive and least critical judges. The quality assurance system would come next, less positive but basically supportive (thousands of teachers are employed in the system). Employers would come third: they judge in terms of money, and what they buy seldom appears good value. Finally, the most negative criticism would be received from teachers themselves. Staffroom judgements can be damning beyond the imagination of college customers. (See **Student Views: Can They Be Trusted?**, p.93)

Enrolment rates

Statistics relating to enrolments are readily available in colleges and LEAs, and can serve a number of marketing purposes.

The year's raw data can be set against target recruitment figures to *reveal areas of underselling*. Such targets are arbitrary in that they reflect agreed resourcing levels (student-staff ratios, average class size) which are dependent to some extent on external funding. Equally arbitrary is the point at which the college considers shortfall disturbing, e.g. new courses may build up over several runs, either through lack of promotion or until word-of-mouth has stimulated demand.

At the same time, management may agree to some averaging, so that successful recruiting areas are used to offset less popular ones. No organisation offering scores of courses can expect all of them to recruit equally well. A sudden shortfall can result from market exhaustion or a reversible drop in interest: only time will reveal which.

A college may also decide to offer what in schools are called 'minority' subjects, study areas which interest few students, but which the management feels worthy of subsidy. The explanation may be ideological or a commitment to image enhancement (more choices than rivals offer).

By looking backwards and comparing the year's enrolments with those in previous years (*trend analysis*), one can detect growth or decline in courses and markets (school leavers, women). One can also *project future demands* on the basis of past demands (assuming trend continuity) or explore the likely impacts of increased or decreased demand. The latter is speculative but helps to reveal the consequences of alternative futures.

Student Views:

Can They Be Trusted?

Little has aroused more anxiety in Responsive College projects than the idea of questioning students about courses and colleges.

Over and over project workers were warned. Teachers would object. They would feel threatened.

There was a strong conviction that, given a chance, students would rubbish the staff and the college. Students do as little work as possible. They are idle and unreliable. The proverbial sleeping dogs, cans of worms and making of waves have been much mentioned.

Even among those who agreed about the need to questionnaire students, there were strong reservations about results. As a local steering committee employer member put it, 'Ask them, but ignore what they say'.

SURPRISING RESULTS

From the beginning it was evident that received wisdom was off beam. The first major survey (Lincolnshire) suggested that apprehensive teachers did not know their students very well.

From the sample of 945, 81 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with their courses (only one per cent very dissatisfied), 72 per cent considered the work very relevant or relevant to their career aspirations (only three per cent very irrelevant), and four-fifths felt they were receiving sufficient counselling and guidance support from teaching staff.

At college level, what surfaced was widespread satisfaction and enthusiastic support for teachers. Many of the latter should have submitted student testimony with their next job applications.

When dissatisfaction emerged, it did not surface evenly across the college, but concentrated in particular areas. Students were very specific about problems.

In one department (137 respondents), 97 per cent felt they were on the right courses, but that change was needed: 37 per cent were dissatisfied with courses (old-fashioned teaching and equipment, poor organisation), 51 per cent believed they were receiving insufficient teacher support (a fifth felt that teachers didn't care), and a third felt underworked. At the same time, the courses revealed high absence rates (20 per cent) but also high retention rates (96 per cent).

None of this suggested indiscriminate rubbishing, or the work of idlers on a vendetta trail. The last mentioned department certainly had worries. It also aroused grievances which needed addressing.

However, for the vast majority (four-fifths) of college staff, the student survey brought good news. It provided visible confirmation of work well done and much appreciated. Few service industries can claim higher rates of client satisfaction. Students appeared uncommonly supportive.

FURTHER EVIDENCE

Subsequent surveys have confirmed the above picture. There has been a programme study of 2,500 respondents (from Cleveland, Doncaster, Gwynedd, Lancashire, Newham, Sheffield,

Strathclyde). This used a five-point response scale. Combining the two most positive responses, one encounters a high level of support for the teaching (70 per cent) and clear evidence that an overwhelming majority of students feel positively towards lecturers.

With other aspects of the course, approval seems to decline. This is demonstrated with reference to: course content (65 per cent), course materials (60 per cent), subject choices available (59 per cent), materials for practical work (55 per cent), and course organisation (50 per cent). Exactly the same pattern of diminishing support is repeated (on a cruder satisfactory/unsatisfactory response scale) in a Strathclyde study of 648 students.

Despite any reservations, a willingness to recommend the course to a friend persists (79 per cent in the programme survey, 91 per cent in Strathclyde). Students are not indiscriminate, but neither are they unreasonably critical.

PROVISION, NOT PEOPLE

Where student disapproval does surface is in response to college facilities.

In the study of 2,500 students (again combining scores for the two most positive response points) one meets decreasing support for: specialist rooms (55 per cent), help from support staff (49 per cent), impression of the buildings from outside (40 per cent) and inside (36 per cent), the classrooms (36 per cent), the canteen (30 per cent) and other social areas (24 per cent).

With the Strathclyde study, the two-point scale tends to generate higher 'positive' scores ('satisfactory' is in the 80s) until we arrive at other social areas (49 per cent) and the canteen (47 per cent). The latter two remain a focus of dissatisfaction.

THOUGHTFUL EVALUATION

When one disaggregates (as in Lincolnshire), what emerges is even higher levels of satisfaction in most college departments and courses, with dissatisfaction concentrated in particular areas. Of course, whether such news ought to be revealed may be debated.

On the one hand it exposes customer needs which might otherwise have remained discreetly hidden. On the other, it offers teachers and managers an opportunity to respond to those needs. Not wishing to know or to help raises questions about professional integrity.

Taken altogether, the evidence from more than 4,000 students working in a wide range of curriculum sectors and drawn from nine project areas (in England, Scotland and Wales) reveals students as generally enthusiastic and considerate in their responses.

NO UNIFORMITY OF VIEWS

Even where there is unmistakable evidence of customer discontent, as in the Lincolnshire department, there is also positive feedback. If just over a third were dissatisfied with their courses, nearly two-thirds were satisfied or very satisfied.

The predicted savaging has not occurred. One is confronting degrees of disaffection rather than blanket condemnation.

The reason is that, as with all customers, there is no such thing as a student view, only a variety of views variously held. On every single topic there is disagreement. In the programme survey, virtually identical proportions (to 0.1 per cent) of students rated the canteen positively (very good or good) and negatively (below standard or bad).

NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR

An interesting paradox remains. If one is seeking widespread condemnation of teachers, courses and colleges, one will not find it in student evidence. However one will encounter it elsewhere in this volume, extracted from comparable surveys of employers.

In Gwynedd, only a third of 50 firms thought colleges were doing a good job. From an equal number of Sheffield companies, fewer would regularly contact colleges for help with training problems. Among 63 Strathclyde employers, nearly two-thirds used private providers and many had serious reservations about college performance. From 871 Dudley employers, 42 per cent used private sector trainers. And so on...

If employer attitudes towards teachers were as positive as those of students, most colleges might be justifiably delighted. They might also face fewer recruitment problems. Fear of student views seems to reveal more about the fearful than the feared.

It also suggests that traditional fears are misplaced. Teachers who feel threatened by students are arming against the wrong foe.

Sources: Crowson/Chapman, Doherty/Woodhall, Howie/Traynor (1987), Jones/Dunkin, Lincolnshire Responsive College Project, Theodossin/Thomson.

If these data are used, one will require application as well as enrolment numbers, since a course can fill its quota amidst declining demand, until the time when there are fewer purchasers than places.

Retention and absence rates

Customers can vote with their feet. When students disappear in large numbers, something may indeed be wrong. There can of course be other explanations: an employer taking on staff, difficulties with transport, illness, moving to another area, etc.

Low retention rates need not even involve departure from college. When a student decides that her course is unsatisfactory, while friends are pleased with theirs, she may join them.

Absence - particularly regularly from the classes of one or two teachers and during the middle of a college day - may reflect customer dissatisfaction: why waste time? Coming late or leaving early can indicate a similar attitude, but they may also suggest other problems, including transport.

If retention rates are to be used as performance indicators, norms need to be established by subjects (some are more demanding than others) before seeking to explain high or low rates. Apart from possible variations among curriculum sectors, one might also anticipate differences among delivery modes: distance/open learning students might find it more difficult to sustain involvement than students on conventional courses.

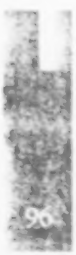
Client satisfaction surveying

The use of questionnaires to survey student perceptions of course and college is increasing. Provided the returns are anonymous, few students fail to cooperate.

The problem is selling the idea to teachers, who are likely to be anxious in the first instance. This subsides once they realise that high levels of client satisfaction are the norm as far as lecturers are concerned. With other aspects of the college experience - course materials and organisation, canteen, classrooms and buildings, etc. - there may indeed be some disapprobation, but addressing it positively is usually to the advantage of the whole community.

Up to now most questionnairing has been general, i.e. about the course rather than this class or that teacher. In some colleges there has been a move towards more focussed items, e.g. questions about the presentation of topics, teacher comments on marked work, or a teaching technique. At that point the data cease to have much broad marketing or managerial use, but the results can be very helpful to individual teachers.

Questionnairing students has two potential drawbacks. In very large colleges with 10,000 to 20,000 students, getting around to every learner once a year is difficult, not because of the mechanics of collection but because the resulting information can be more than management can handle.



A second difficulty is expense. The collection of data for many of the indicators discussed here (enrolments, examination results) is a routine part of college administration. With student questionnairing there are new and additional costs.

These depend on who does the administration (teachers seem the likely choice) and who analyses the returns. However one looks at it, lecturer time is comparatively costly, even though its use tends to be hidden because one is borrowing from teaching time. In an effort to make the latter stages of data handling less costly, colleges have begun to move towards computerised systems which rely almost exclusively on administrative staff. They are also adopting shorter questionnaires and going for sampling rather than universal surveying.

With employers as customers one is back to the constraint associated with market research surveying: low returns. In some areas over-questionnairing has led to employer resistance.

Finally, we should remember that customer surveying - provided it is accompanied by positive responses to valid criticisms - can be a powerful public relations exercise.

Examination pass rates

Examination results are a data source which all colleges possess and use. The statistics figure prominently in reports to governing bodies and have traditionally served to demonstrate achievement. When rates are high and the news is good, pass rates are regarded as reliable indicators. When the reverse is true, the disadvantages are rehearsed: they reflect student rather than teacher ability; they are never an accurate guide to learning and teaching because all testing involves selection; from time to time injustices occur; some examinations are criterion referenced and others norm referenced, so one may be comparing like with unlike. And so on.

On their own, examination pass rates cannot tell the whole story, but as part of a portfolio of indicators they can contribute effectively to a more comprehensive approach. They certainly cannot be ignored.

Student progression

Student progression sits uneasily in the catetory of performance indicator. What happens to students once they leave college derives from the difference (if any) between what they want and what the world will accept. An economic depression can make it difficult for gifted, well qualified people to find work. Oversubscription

(e.g. veterinary courses) can mean competition which few will survive. Conversely, a skill shortage can lead to jobs for those who failed examinations.

Nor can one easily talk about norms in student destinations. Whether leavers move on to other courses or jobs, become unwaged or self-employed, cannot have much to do with norms. If the department is more committed to higher education access courses than vocational training, student progression will reflect the bias. Moreover, how does one deal with employed students who are studying to get a better job?

At the same time, if one assumes that most students attend college (at least in part) in order to do something with their learning in the outside world, how can one ignore outcomes?

Apart from those who go on to more advanced courses, destination data are difficult to collect since they can involve tracking over long periods of time. Their main use as a performance indicator is in revealing to what extent the end has matched the goal. The latter is usually taken to be either further study or work: there are certainly uncomfortable questions to be asked about access or vocational courses which lead nowhere for many ex-students.

In addition, destination analysis produces useful information for applicants and current students. It also suggests that the college cares about what happens to students.

Repeat business

The overwhelming majority of college users are one-time buyers. Even if they value their experience, it would be inappropriate for them to return. For a small but significant minority that is not the case.

Among students most repeaters will be found in adult education. Many of these people have been attending for a dozen or more years. If few return in a decade of earlier retirement and increased leisure, there may be something seriously wrong with provision.

Among employers the incentives for getting repeat business are even greater. Customised short courses are expensive to mount:

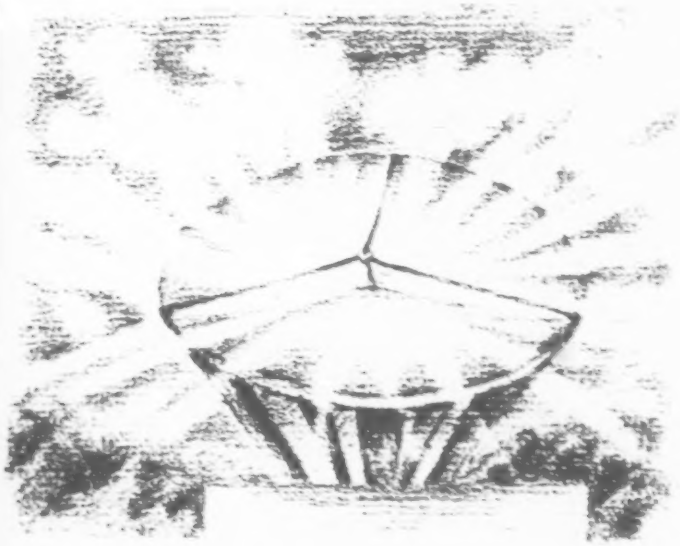
with repetition the investment/profit equation turns in the college's favour. In some institutions, fewer than 50 employers can account for two-thirds or more of the college's day release students: such customers need to be cherished.

Where good employer customers suddenly disappear from the enrolment files, it is important to learn the reason. They may have gone out of business, but they may also have found a more effective and efficient training agency.

Moving forward...

A college cannot expect to move from a nil use of performance indicators to a full and comprehensive system in one dramatic, all-embracing transformation. Change is easier to introduce and accommodate incrementally.

Setting up a quality control and after-sales system has to follow a realistic appraisal of the possibilities and the problems of scale and resourcing. One is unlikely to get it right at the first attempt, or be able to continue for long without adjustments. What is intended is a scanning device, not a strategic defence network. The end is to know where further enquiry may reveal problems. The system is a means to an end, a starting point rather than a desired achievement. The greatest dangers lie in attempting too much too rapidly.



The system should be viewed in terms of the opportunities it provides as well as the statistics it generates. A customer-centred quality control system will increase sales but it can also make learning and teaching more rewarding and help to ease the political tensions that afflict large organisations.

After-sales work can be useful beyond information gathering for existing courses. There are possibilities for additional sales and a marketing research function which can result in new provision for the

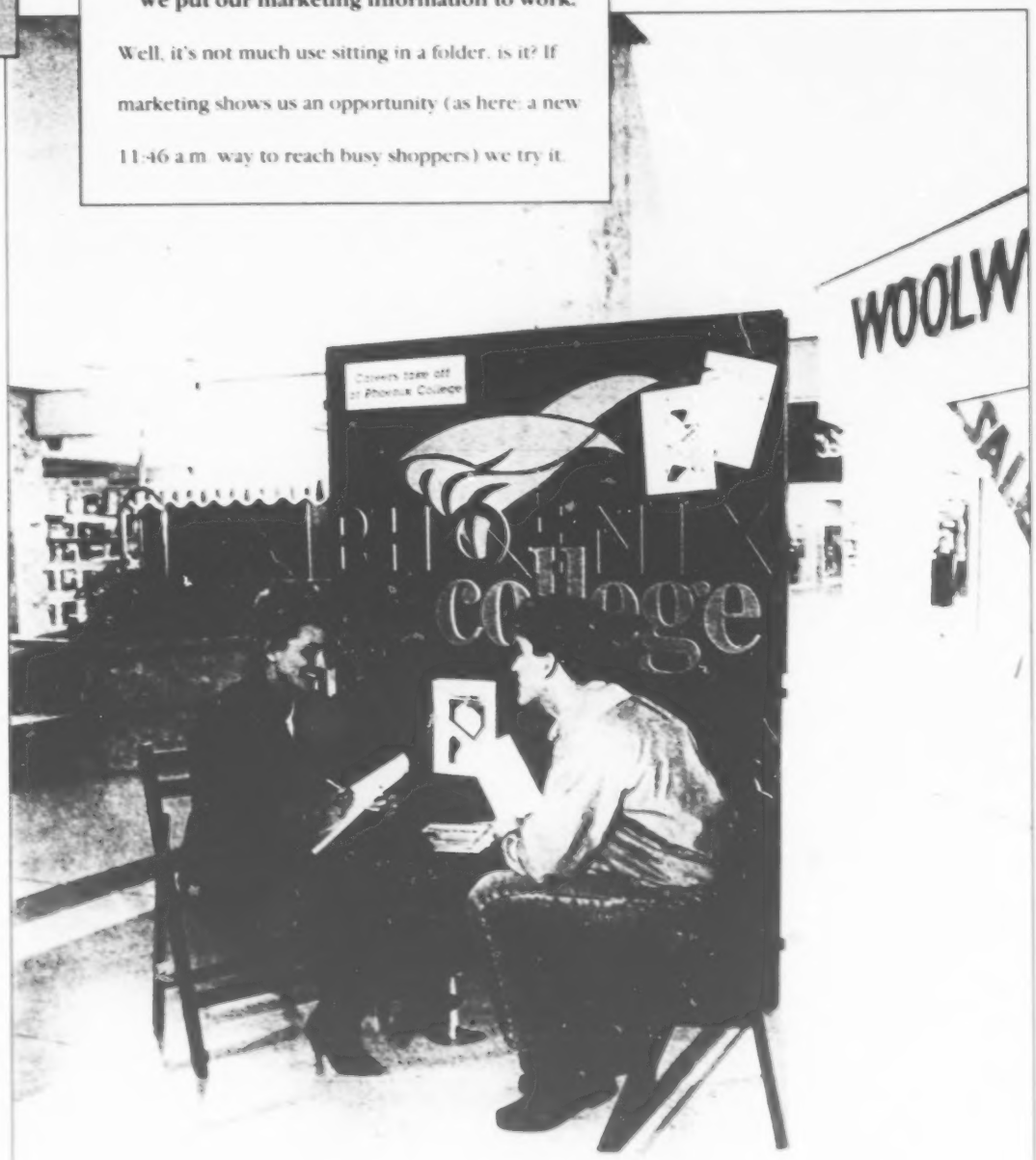
college and new training for the employer and ex-students. It can also help with student placements and with creating industrial secondment openings for teachers. If the college maintains regular contact with a significant and representative proportion of employers and ex-students, it will be much more sensitive to shifts and changes in the market-place.

Chapter 5

Managers and Marketeers

We put our marketing information to work.

Well, it's not much use sitting in a folder, is it? If marketing shows us an opportunity (as here: a new 11:46 a.m. way to reach busy shoppers) we try it.



"Not only do we have more satisfied customers, but we also have more customers!"

anagers and Marketeers

The college marketeer who performs the tasks described in previous sections can be seen as discharging his/her professional duties. The marketeer is there to set up and run a system for collecting and disseminating information, but college managers are responsible for using the information.

Marketeers cannot alter or close existing courses, or reallocate resources. Marketeers are facilitators. They can organise and support, urge and remind but they cannot manage for others.

Marketing tries to provide a rational support system for management in a non-rational world. The goal is action, and action is a reductivist activity. Confronted by many options, because one cannot do everything, in order to do anything at all one must select and prioritise. If today's choice is to link with tomorrow's, there must be a plan.

But plans - even the marketing kind - have to be worked. In the end, staff either support the plan work or do not - or cannot.

The comfortable solution is to go for new staff, if not everywhere at least at key points, and generally in senior posts. The marketing problem is that senior staff spend less time and to less purpose with customers than do their juniors. Principals and heads may dominate the staffroom, but to customers the most important person is the one dealing with them at the moment - the telephonist or the lecturer completing the sale. Marketing therefore imposes on managers the need to make the best of most existing staff, and this presents its own demands.

Many of the tasks and the changes which a marketing approach imposes on staff cannot be achieved without assistance and training. *Staff development* is essential. Buying desk-top publishing or new cameras will not turn lecturers and technicians into skilled advertising artists or video producers.

All staff require *awareness-raising* if marketing is to work. Reception staff need training in handling customers and (not least) in understanding the college's offerings and internal structure. Lecturers need updating via industrial secondments. Those who visit employers need help with interviewing skills. If reception areas are to be transformed and maintained, there are implications for caretaker and cleaning staff. And so on. Staff development must move from a preoccupation with courses and qualifications (frequently the prelude to a job move) to encompass training requirements which assist the college to do its job better.

Managers have to *sell the marketing approach*. Staff are usually prepared to help if they can see personal benefit in what they are being asked to do. What's in it for me? or Where's my cut? are familiar questions to marketeers. Management's job is not to exhort to private sacrifice and virtuous behaviour, but to convince the sceptical that they stand to gain from change - and then deliver the benefits.

One way to convince people of benefits is to ensure that *the marketing management information system brings* not just bad but *good news* as well. That means congratulating and rewarding achievement. All organisations have weaknesses and experience threats, but they also have strengths and opportunities: a positive approach helps.

Marketing also requires *a more open approach* to college management. Communicating with customers exposes problems which silence hides. The implications impact not just on teacher and support staff, but on managers as well.

Whatever enthusiasm he/she brings to a new job, in the end the marketeer depends on management for success, and in particular the principal. Marketing the college is about putting customers first. The marketeer can feed the system with consumer data, but management needs to ensure that commitment to customers is valued, fostered and rewarded.

Appendix, References and Index

ppendix: The Responsive College ogramme

The idea of a marketing programme emerged from a small (£20,000) exploratory project funded by the then Manpower Services Commission (MSC) at the Further Education Staff College. The result was **In search of the responsive college** (Theodossin, 1986) which explored a wide range of perceptions (from central and local government, colleges, employers, local authorities, unions, etc.) of how colleges might become more responsive to industrial training needs.

A decision was taken to run college-based (hence, the responsive *college*) marketing projects. While programme proposals were being discussed, local education authorities (LEAs) and the MSC negotiated collaborative involvement in college funding. The new arrangements gave LEAs a central role, which was reflected in the programme's acting as broker and using MSC funds to set up 10 projects whose contracts were between the staff college and LEAs.

There was some shift over focus. To overcome teacher concerns, the programme not only dealt with employer needs but those of students as well. The boundary was further extended to add higher education to non-advanced further education. Elsewhere a line was drawn around work-related activity: the programme ignored O and A Levels, the unwaged, arts degrees, and education for leisure.

From the beginning the emphasis was on an action (rather than research) programme. Pure research of the social-science variety aims at describing what has happened. It seeks to be value-free, neutral, detached. The researcher is there to record and analyse, not to influence. Whatever happens is interesting, since the researcher has no preferences.

An action programme, however, begins with aims and objectives directed at altering the behaviour of its subjects. The intention is to be prescriptive. Some outcomes are acceptable, and others not. The pure researcher is happiest when his presence has made the least difference, but the action programme worker's satisfaction comes from making an impact.

The over-all programme goal was to devise systems, instruments, strategies and tactics for involving customers in the delivery of their own education and training. The intention was to get colleges to communicate with customers, but how, how often and in what ways were left for college partners to determine.

The programme began in October 1985 with a central team to provide supervision. There were 10 two-year projects in two groups with staggered starts. There was also a national steering committee, chaired by MSC and with local authority employees and civil servants far outnumbering employer representatives. At its first meeting the group decided that project steering committees would have fuller employer representation and be chaired by an employer.

The national steering committee chose four first-round project bids from 12 LEAs invited (one declined) by MSC to submit proposals: work started in Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Lincolnshire and Sheffield in 1986. All remaining LEAs were invited to bid for second-round projects, and 53 submitted proposals. Seventeen were shortlisted and

six chosen: Cleveland, Doncaster, Gwynedd, Lancashire, Newham and Strathclyde began work between October 1986 and January 1987.

Most projects accepted a common structure, two full-time workers of equal status, a secretary, and a small steering committee meeting three times a year. Average project funding was £60,000 for each of the two years.

The proposal specified that projects should encompass a wide range of variables, so that the work of the programme could embrace every kind of college. The projects were to involve large and small colleges with limited (monotechnic) and varied (advanced and non-advanced) product ranges, operating within dispersed and centralised LEA organisation, in areas of high and low unemployment, etc. The intended diversity was further augmented by an MSC decision to fund the 11 shortlisted but unselected second round proposals, although for one year only in the first instance, and generally for under £50,000 each. Work was soon underway in Buckinghamshire, Calderdale, Dudley, Dyfed, East Sussex, Hereford and Worcester, Kent, Salford, Somerset, Suffolk and West Glamorgan.

Regular field visits and steering committee attendance provided by the small central team for two-year projects could not be extended to another 11 projects. Compromise was inevitable. A one-day induction workshop was held in Sheffield. Printed materials were made available. The addition of a new member to the central team enabled an information service to be established at the staff college, so new projects could link with the more experienced workers. There was much inter-project visiting. MSC took responsibility for oversight of the additional projects.

The product cycle spiral was the conceptual framework. In two-year projects workers undertook activities in a number of phases, but in the one-year projects shorter life and smaller budgets encourged workers not to think in terms of the cycle as a whole, but to develop work in one part or in an aspect of a phase.

Formal project work terminated at the end of 1988, but a number of projects were extended for varying periods of time. The task of developing a marketing approach continues. A great deal has been learnt, but much remains to be done.

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